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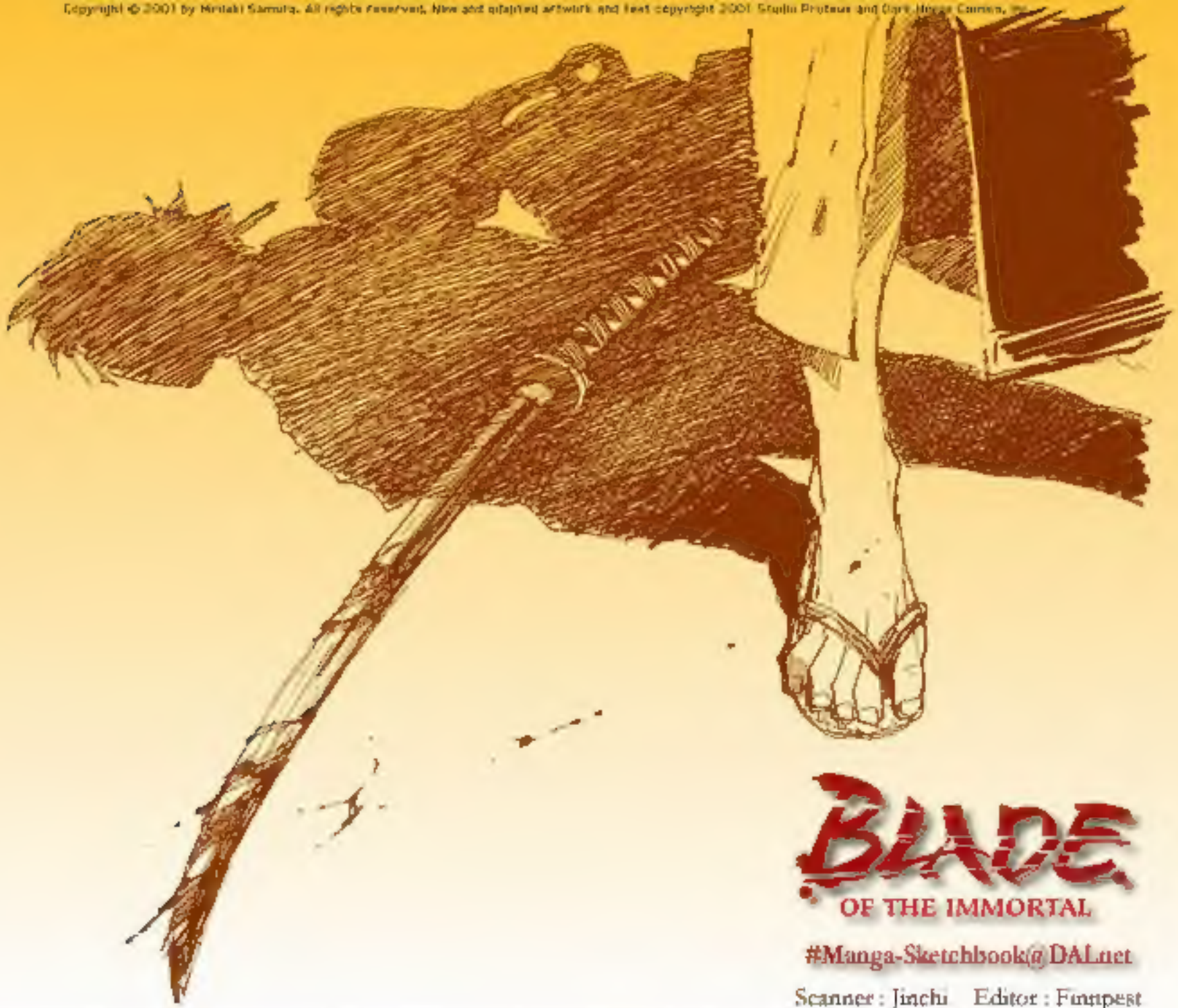


BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

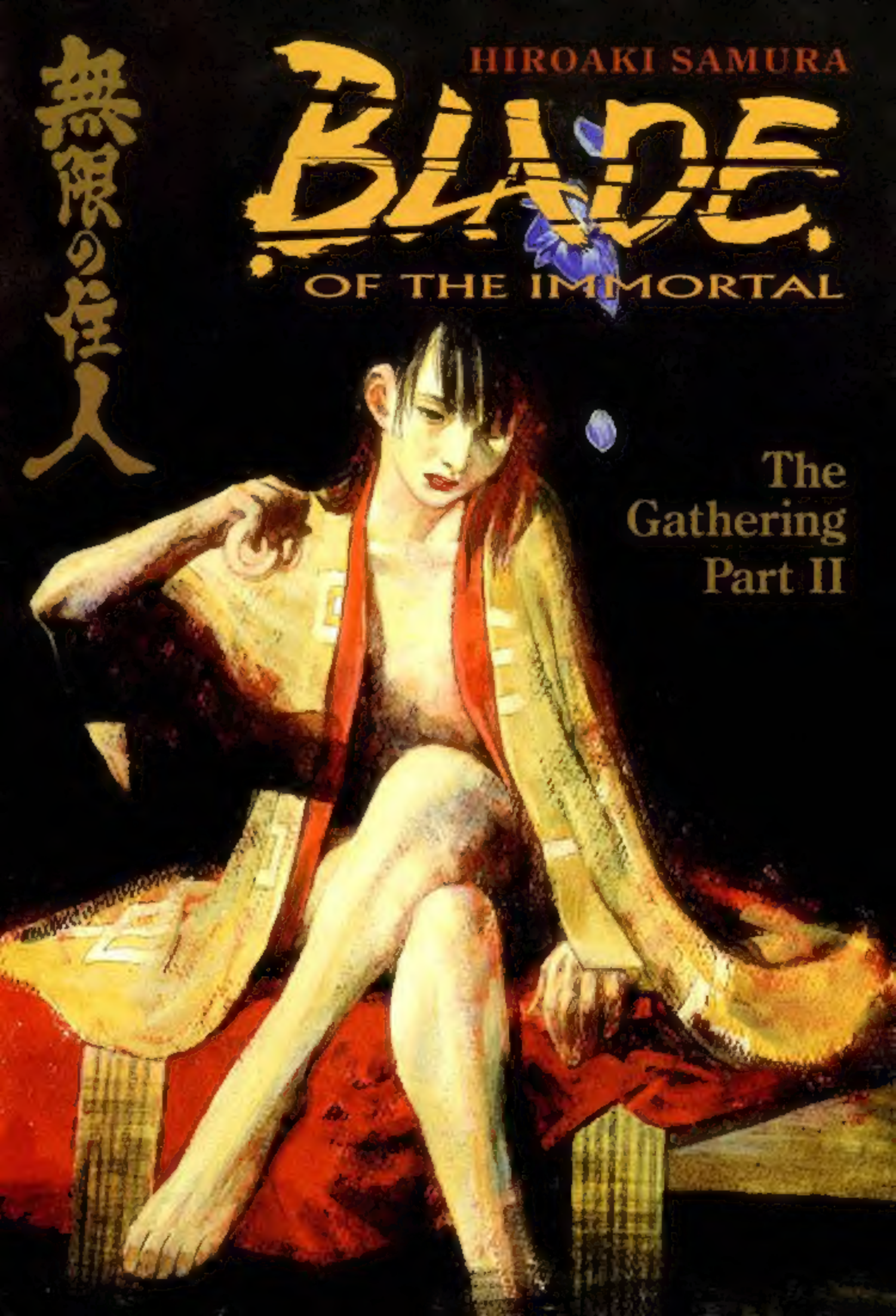
#Manga-Sketchbook@DALnet

Scanner : Jinchu Editor : Funnpest

HIROAKI SAMURA

無限の住人

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL



The Gathering Part II

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

The Gathering II

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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story
HIROAKI SAMURA

translation
Dana Lewis & Toren Smith

lettering and retouch
Tomoko Saito

The Gathering II

DARK HORSE COMICS®

COMRADES
Part 4

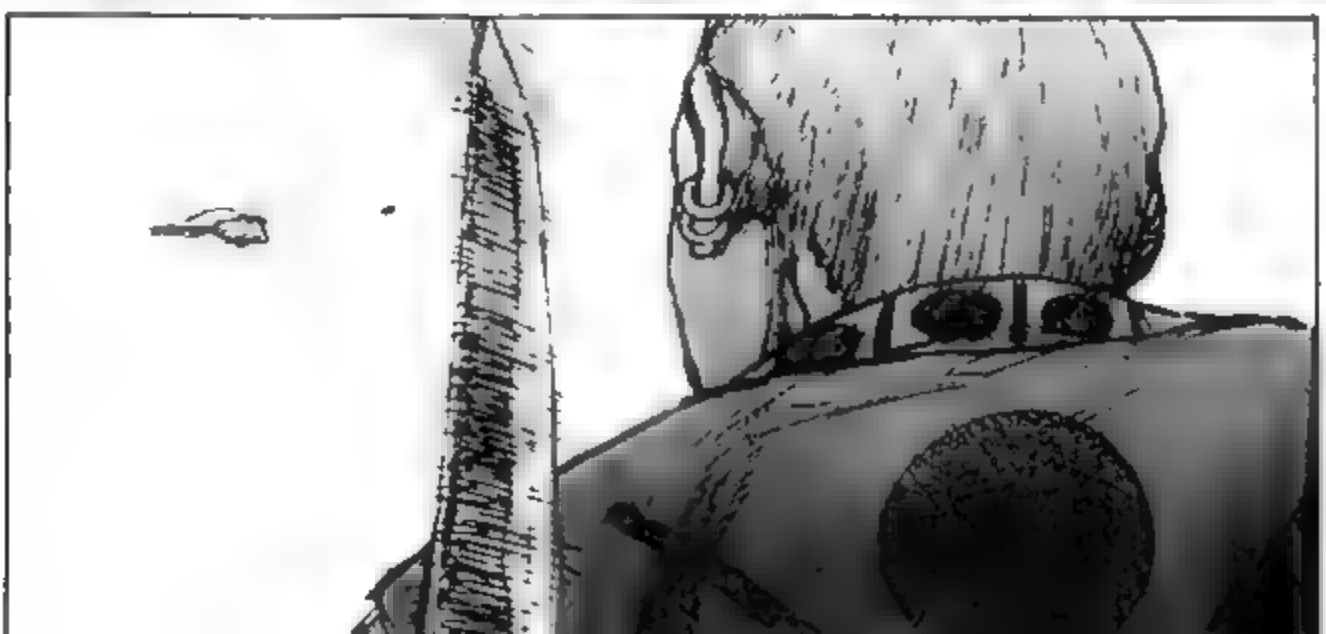
JEEZUS... FRIGGIN' PIECE OF SHIT!
FREAKS ME OUT, MAN... A DUDE WHO WON'T DIE?!
IT JUST AIN'T RIGHT!
STABBED THROUGH THE HEAD AND YOU'RE STILL ALIVE?!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! WON'T BELIEVE IT!

heh...
HEH, HEH, HEH, HEH!
...MISTER IMMORTAL!
NOW THAT'S A LAUGH...
WHEN YOU HACKED OFF YOUR ARM IN FRONT OF US BACK THERE, HOLY SHIT...
...GAVE ME THE FRIGGIN' CHILLS, MAN... IT REALLY DID. YOU GOT GUTS-- I'LL GIVE YA THAT.

BUT, SHIT... WHAT THEN?
I FIGURE'D YOU'D COME AT US SWINGIN' A BLADE, BUT NO...YOU TURN TAIL AND RUN!
HEH HEH HEH
NOT EXACTLY SAMURAI STUFF, DUDE!
IS THAT IMMORTAL BOD OF YOURS ALL YOU'VE GOT GOIN' FOR YA? EH??
KRACH
KA-

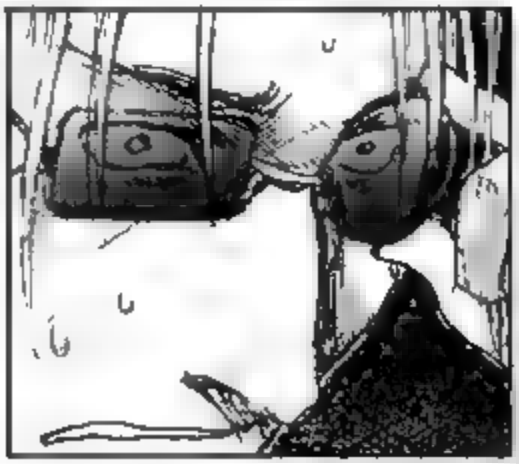
CHOK

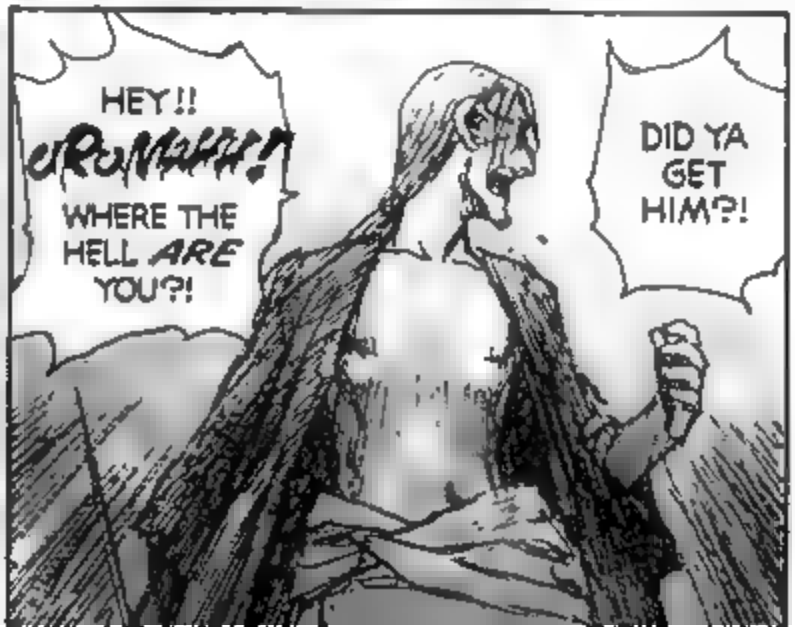
H-
HEY...
THAT'S
NOT...
.....!
WHAT TH-?
.....?!
OH,
SHIT



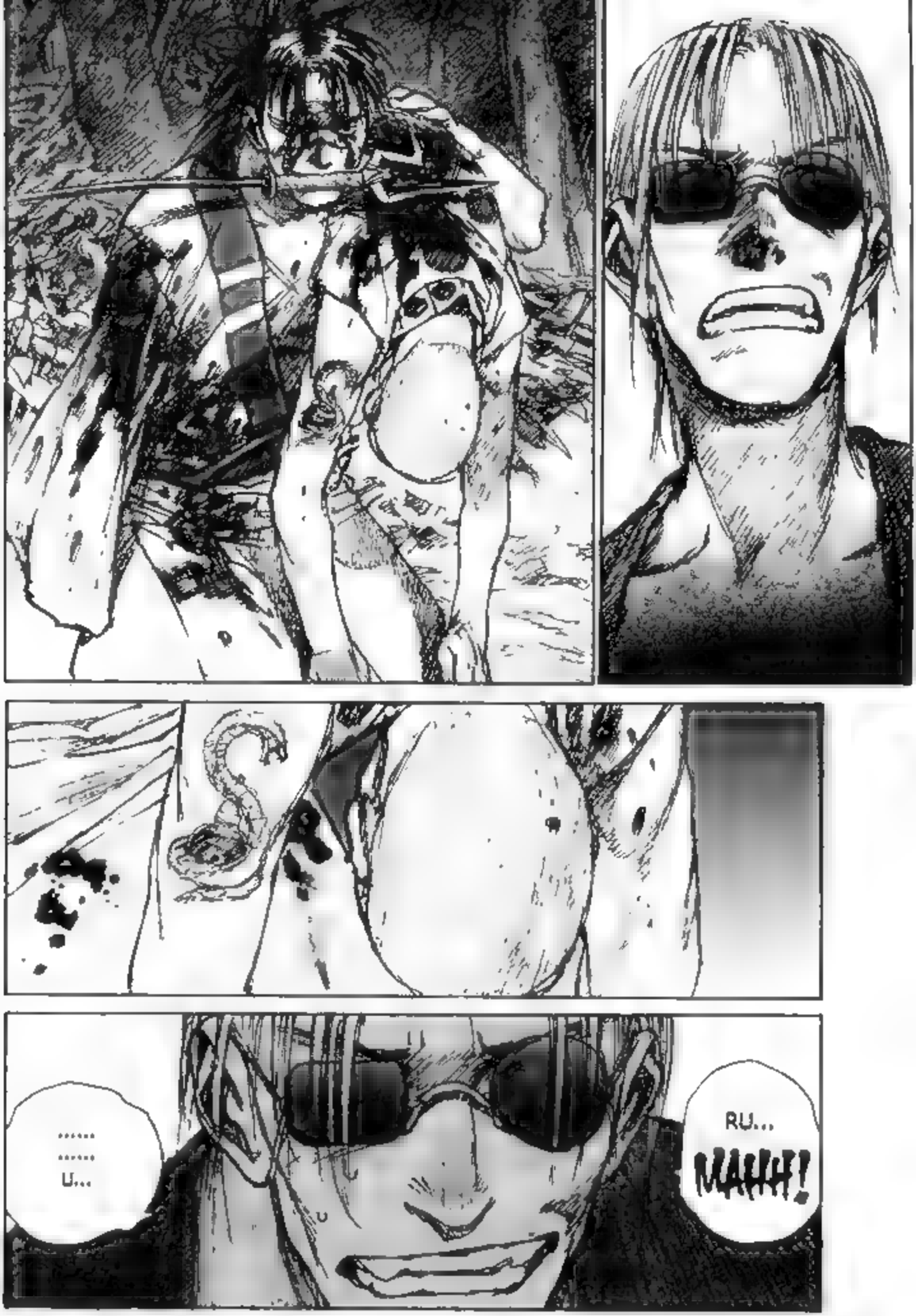
!!

.....
.....
W...WHAT THE HELL WAS *THAT?*
DID I *REALLY* HEAR SOMETHING?




HEY!!
GRUMPH!
WHERE THE HELL *ARE* YOU?!
DID YA GET HIM?!

ANSWER ME, YOU USELESS TURD!!
IF I GOTTA CARRY MY OWN CRAP BACK TO EDO, I'M GONNA BE PISSED!
.....
.....
.....
THIS AIN'T FUNNY, DAMN IT... SHIT... WHO CARES IF HE'S FREAKIN' IMMORTAL?!
HE'S ONLY GOT ONE ARM LEFT!
IF YOU'RE GONNA BE A LOSER, URUMA, JUST KEEP IT TO WHEN YOU'RE GAMBLING WITH ME, OKAY, DUDE?
GOD DAMN IT!!

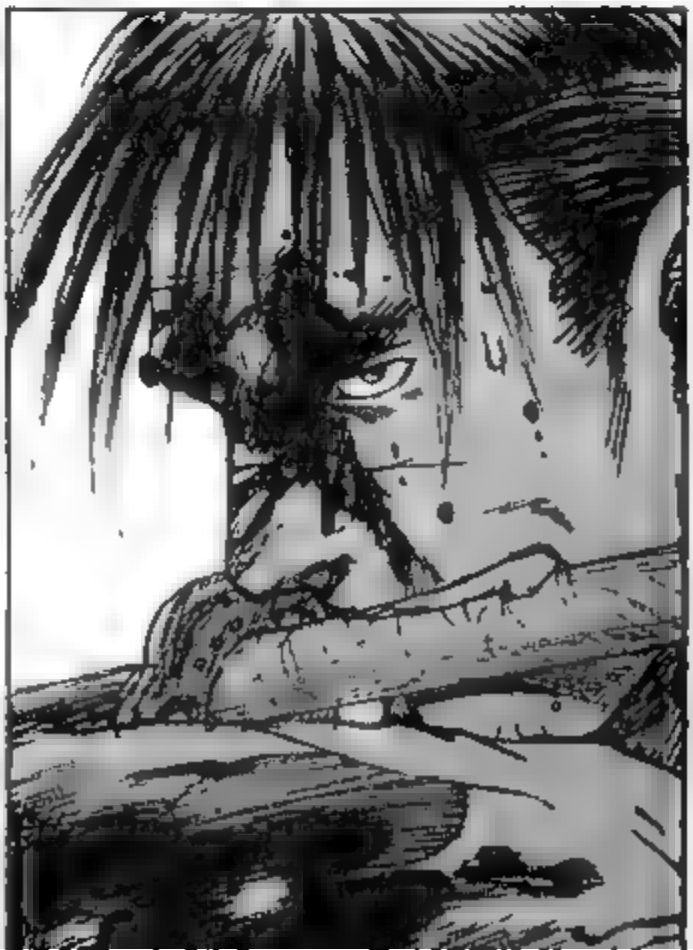

.....
.....
U...
RU...
MAHH!

WUSSH
?!
NNN RRG!
WURA!
DAMN YOUUU!
STOP RUNNING AND FIGHT!!

Ohoo!
heeh
=hahh=
=hahh=
=hahh=
=hahh=

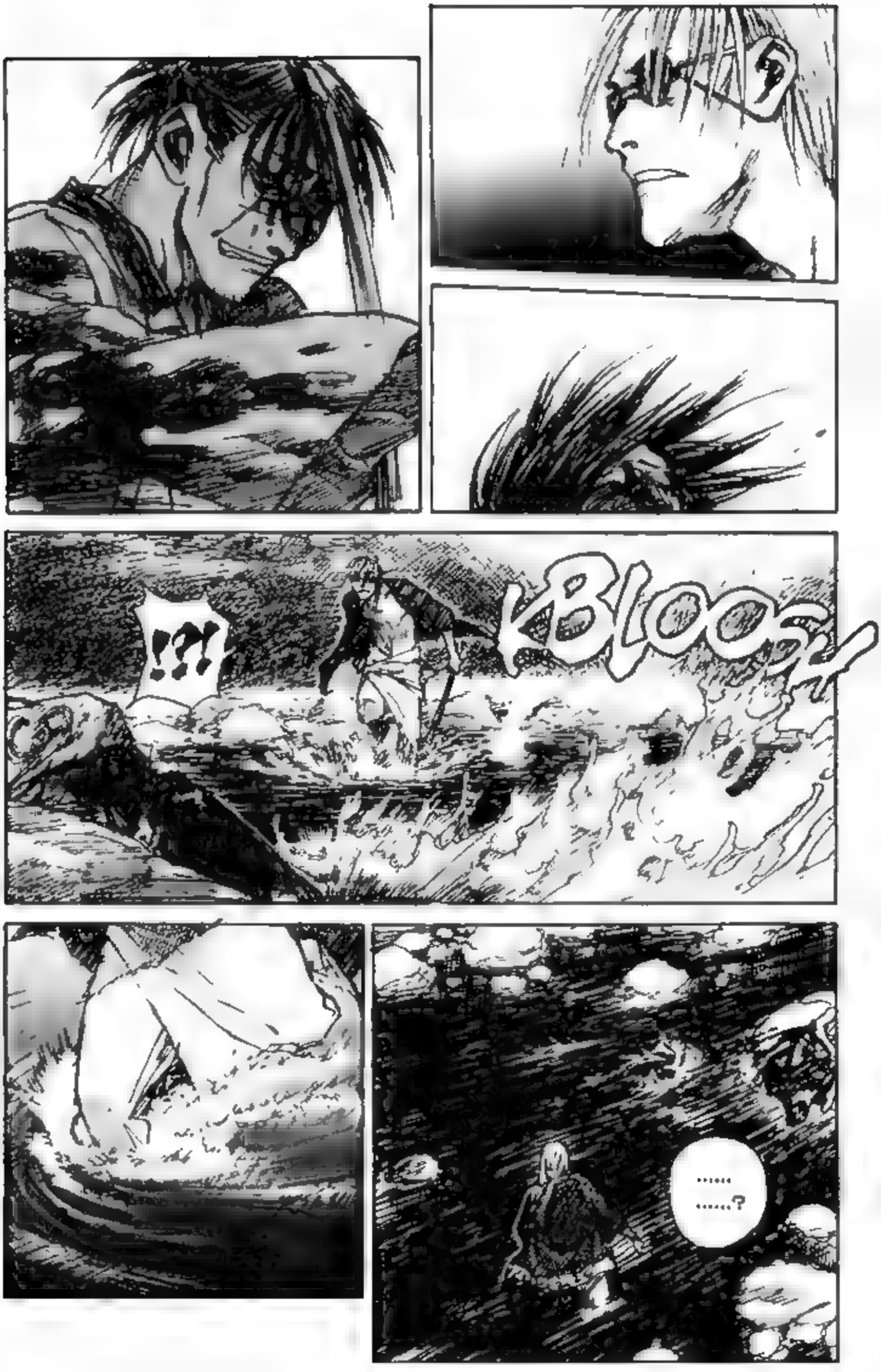
.....
mrgh...
BAD...
NEWS...
EVERY-
THING'S
GOING...
BLURRY...

KLANG!
OWW!



SPLSSH
HEY!
HEY, YOU!!

GCHOK
PAPAA!

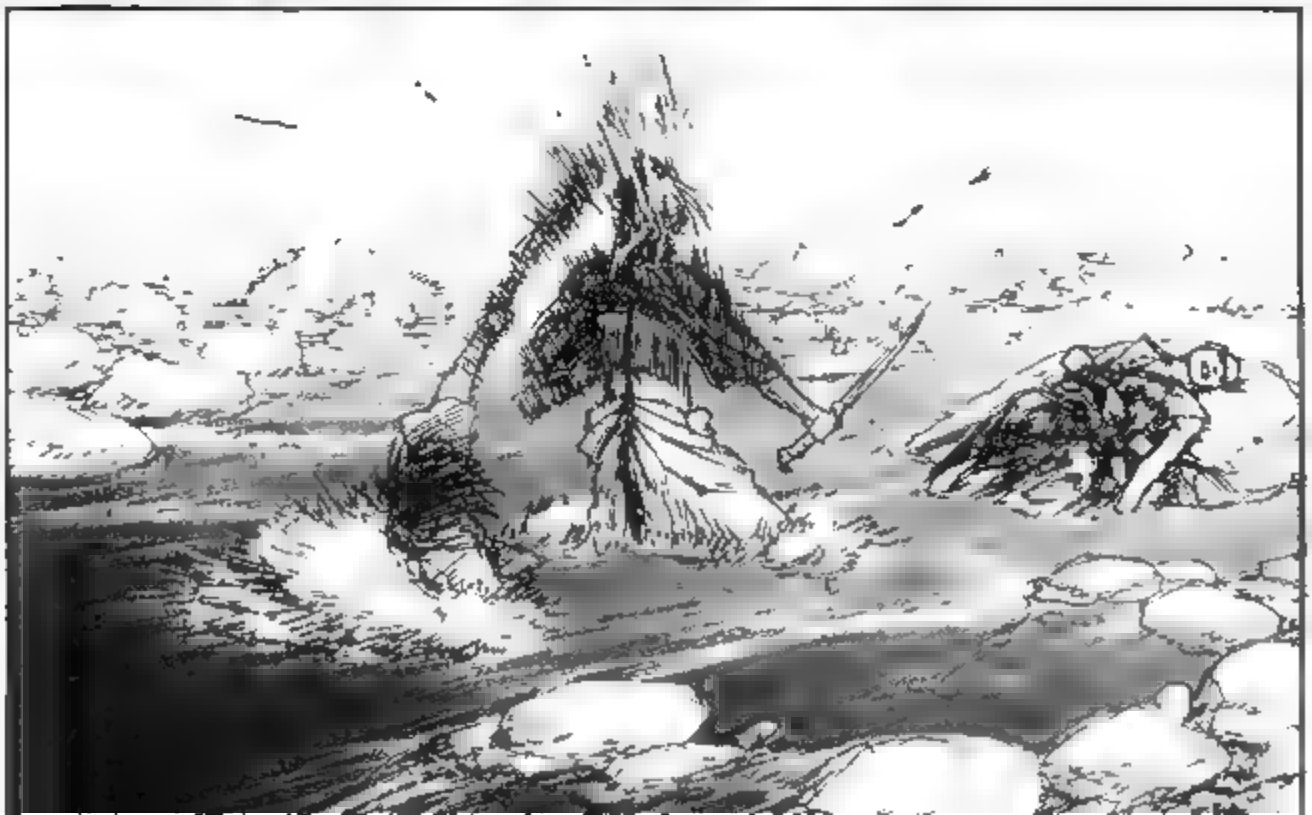

!?!
KBLOOSH
.....?

heh...
YA
DUMB-
SHIT...!
YEAH
?!
YOU
REALLY
THINK YOU
CAN GET
AWAY
IN THIS
LITTLE
PUDDLE?
I CAN
SEE RIGHT
TO THE
DAMN
BOTTOM,
YOU
IDIOT!!
.....
.....?!
WHAT
TH--?

B...
BLOOD...
?!
AW,
MAN...
URUMA...

SPLSSH!
SHI-! I... I CAN'T...
...I CAN'T FRIGGIN' SEE!!
YOU STINKIN' BASTARD!!
HE WAS ALREADY DEAD, MAN! YOU DIDN'T HAFTA... SHIT!!
HAIEE YAAAH!

RYAAA! HAIEE!
SPLSH
SLSH
G...
G...
GOD DAMN IT!!
COME ON, YOU RAT BASTARD!
COME OUT AND FIGHT LIKE--



COULDN'T SEE, HUH...?
WELL. NEITHER COULD I, PAL. SAME FOR BOTH OF US.

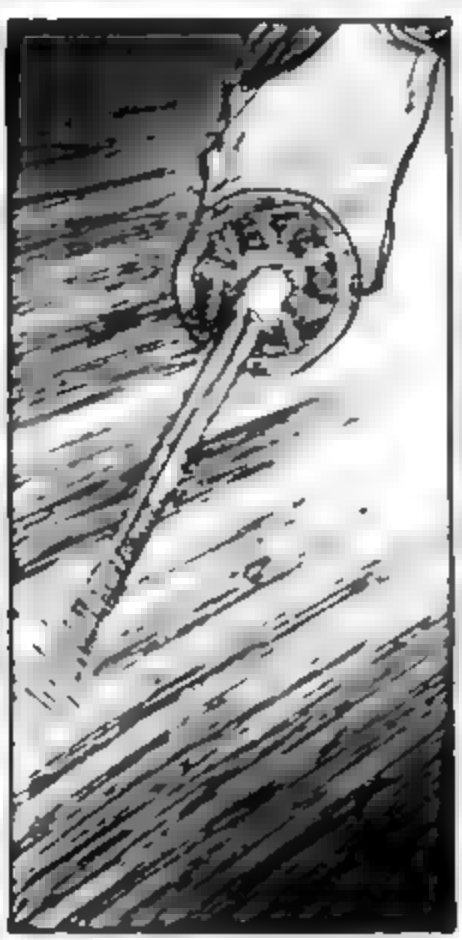
IF YOU'D JUST WAITED FOR YOUR CHANCE LIKE A PRO...
...YOU MIGHT HAVE WON.

-hahh-
NNG...
-kof-
-nff-
HHWF!

-hahh-
-hff-
-ahhm-

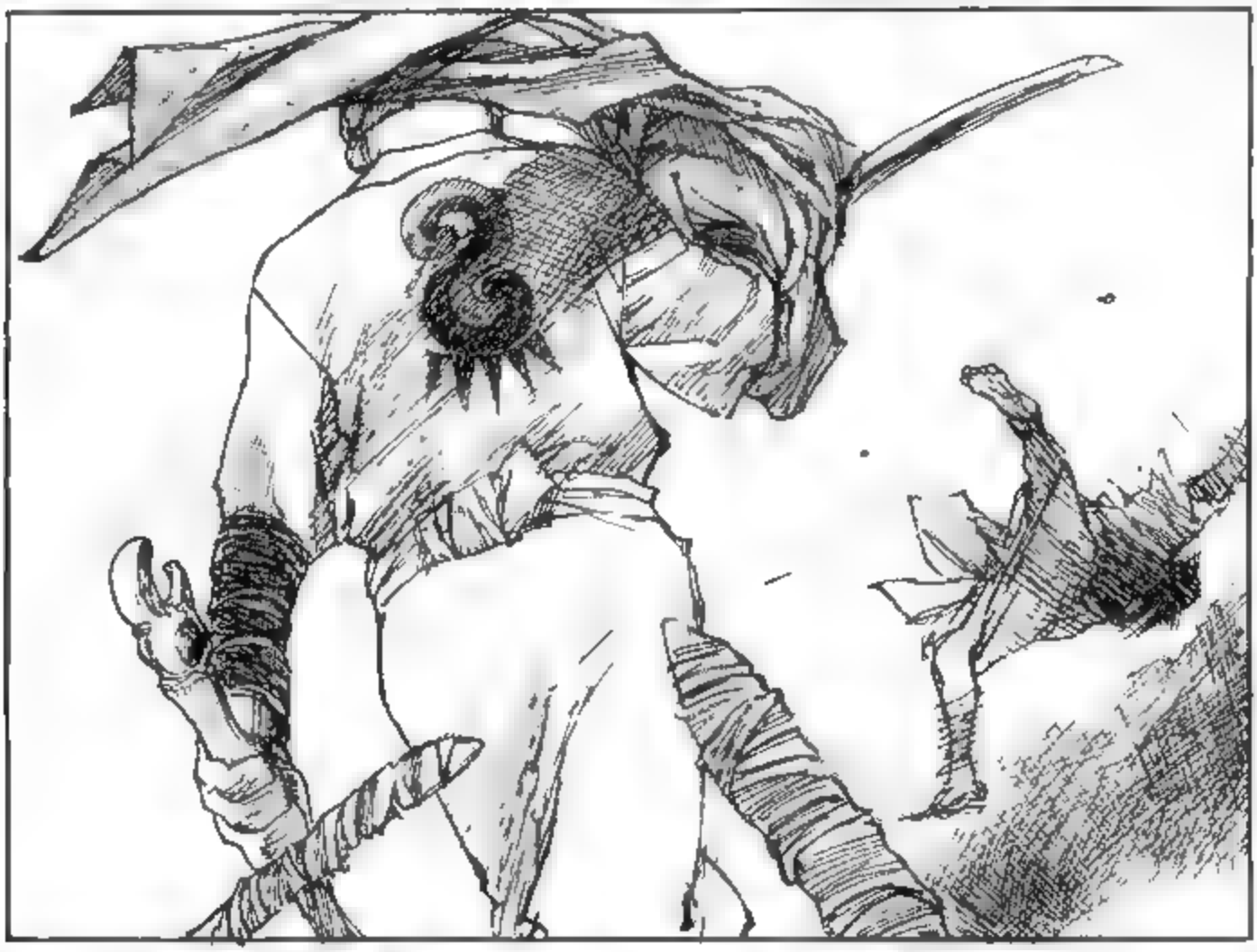
PLAYING IN THE WATER IN THIS HEAT...?
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN... REFRESH-ING.
P- PARADISE, MAN.
YOU... OUTTA TRY IT.
THAT BRAIN OF YOURS... MUST BE PARBOILED, TOWEL HEAD... HEH HEH HEH.

YOU KNOW, I FEEL SORT OF BAD ABOUT ATTACKING A GUY WHEN HE'S ALREADY HALF WHIPPED...
...BUT IF YOU'VE STILL GOT ENOUGH JUICE TO COP AN ATTITUDE, THEN, WELL...



GRAB
CHH-
CHOK

COMRADES
Part 5

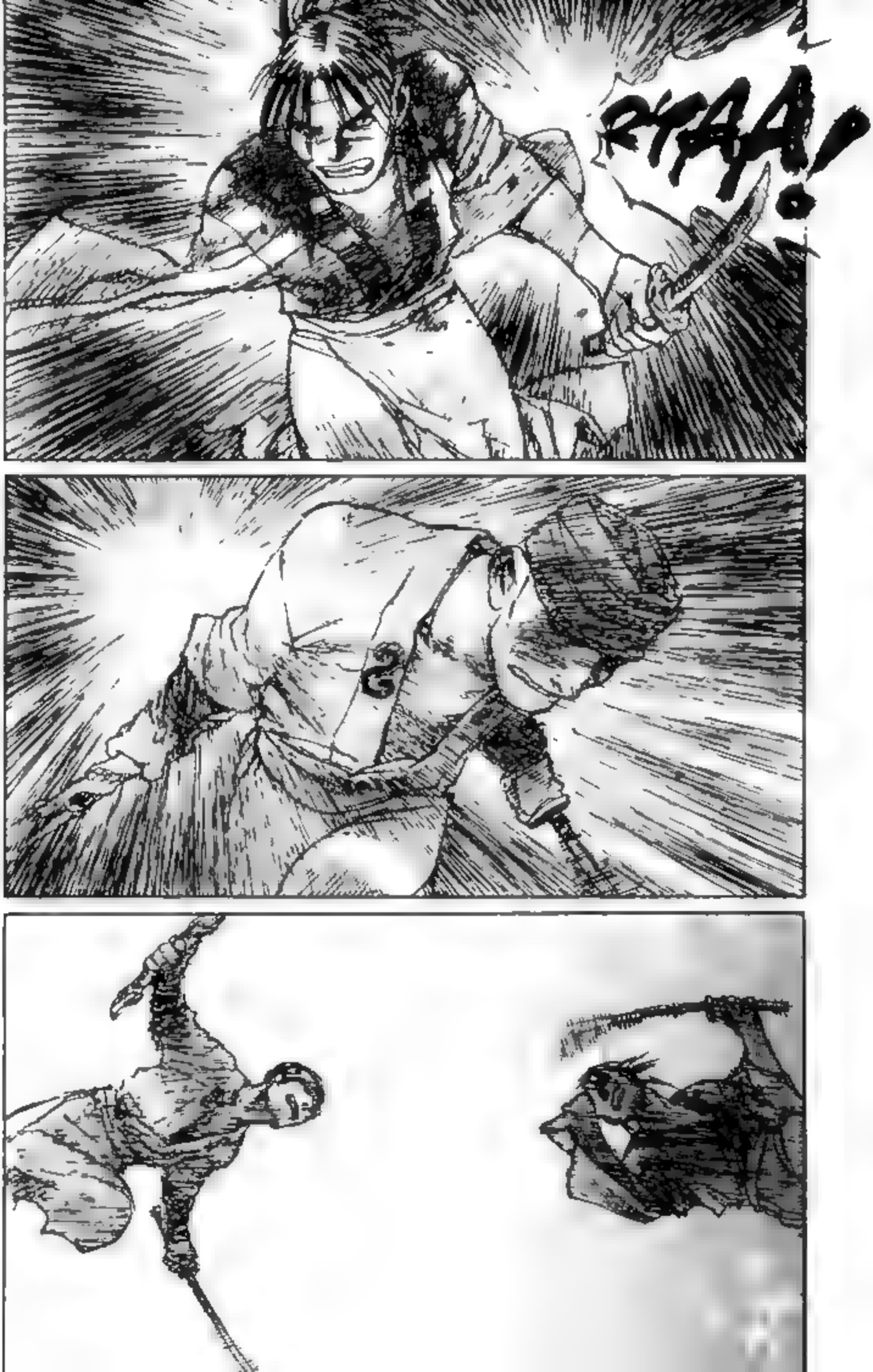


NOW... I SEEM TO RECALL....
...A WHILE BACK YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT A TEGATA.
MY TEGATA...
...IS RIGHT IN HERE.

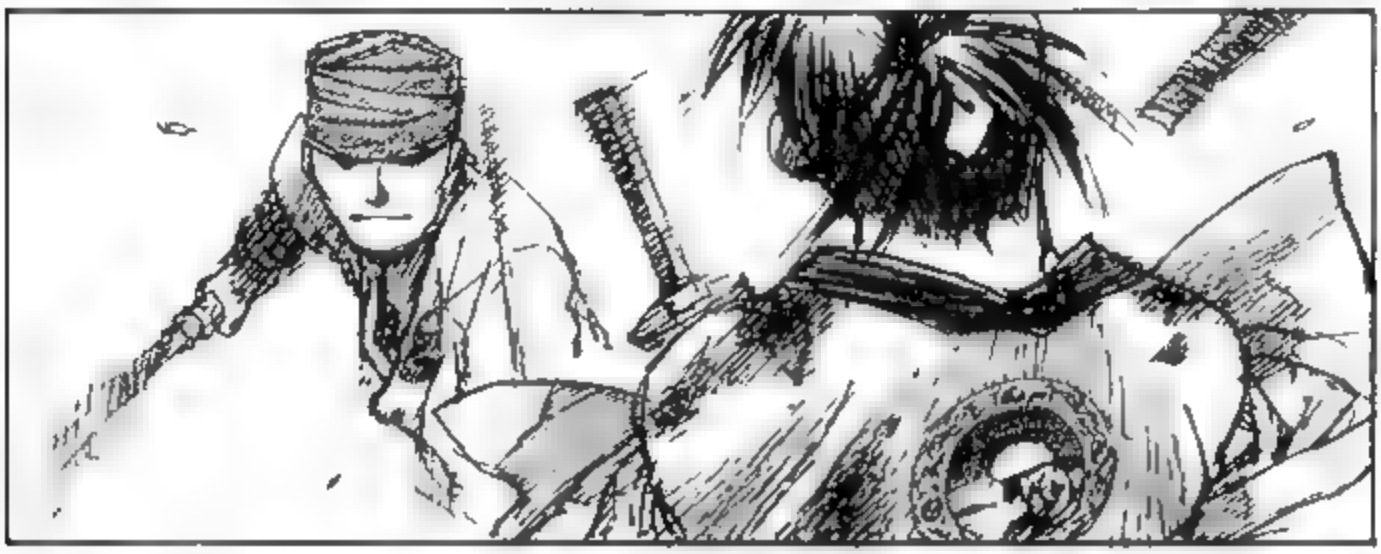
OF COURSE, NOW THAT I KNOW THE LETTER FROM OUR LEADER WAS A FAKE...
...IT'S JUST A USELESS SCRAP OF PAPER TO ME. BUT TO YOU...
.....
.....
YEAH, THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED. YOU WANT IT BAD.
HEH.... MUST'VE BEEN TOUGH FIGHTING ME WHEN YOU HAD TO KEEP FROM RUINING IT WITH BLOOD.
WELL, MY FRIEND-- NOW YOU DON'T HAVE TO HOLD BACK!

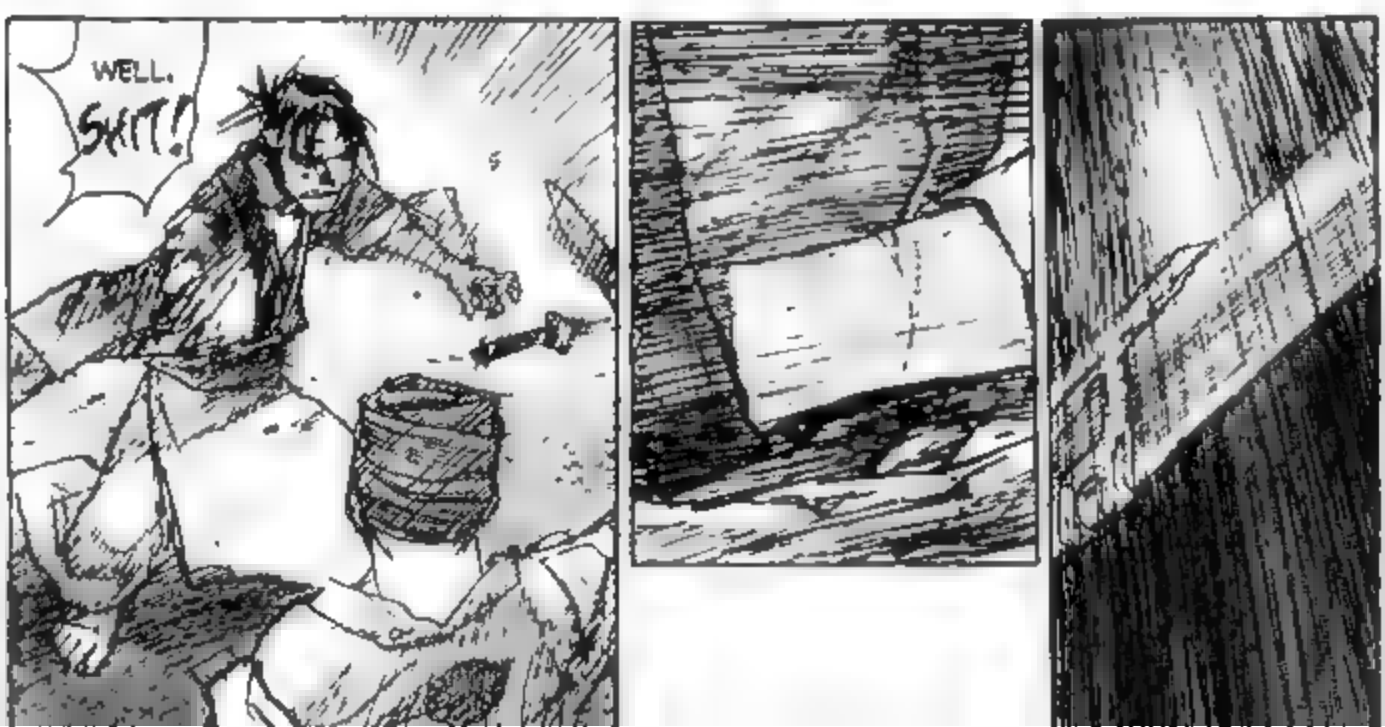
COME ON!
READY FOR SOME HIGH-LEVEL DESTRUCTION TESTING ON THAT IMMORTAL BODY OF YOURS?!
HEH, HEH, HEH!
HA HA HA HA!
BWA HAW HAW!
WHAT A LAUGH! WELL THANKS, ANYWAY!
YOU DUMB-SHIT!

TAKING YOUR LAST CHANCE TO SURVIVE...
...AND THROWING IT AWAY *YOURSELF?* HEY, WHATEVER!
DAMN... BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE WHACKED *THREE* GUYS IN ONE DAY.
GETS THE OLD JUICES FLOWING!
WE'LL SOON SEE!


R'RAA!

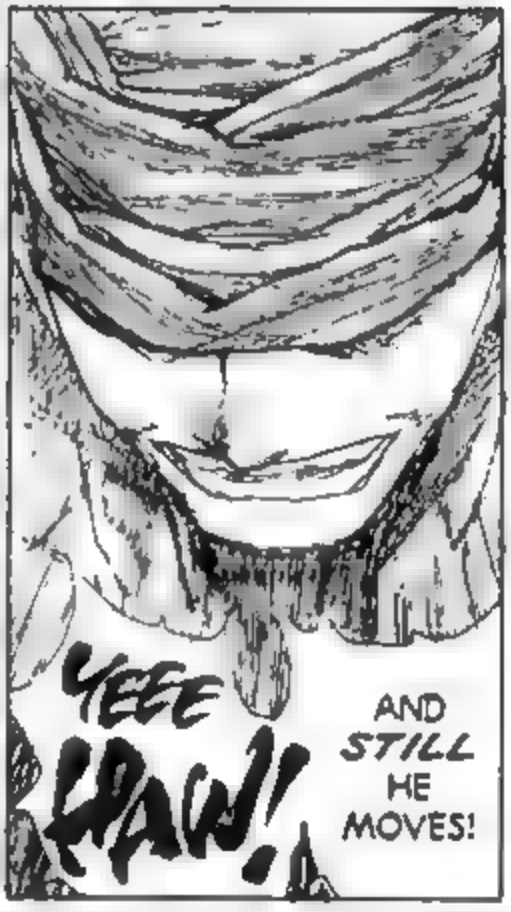
SKSSH
SPANGG
HAAH!!




WELL.
SHIT!

ONE!
TWO!
THREE!
FOUR!
AND...

HUGH!


YEEE
RAW!
AND STILL HE MOVES!

NNG!
-rgrh-
-hnnn-
-rahnn-

MIGHT EVEN HAVE BEEN A DISAPPOINT-MENT ANY OTHER WAY.
SO, TO START .. HMM .. GUESS I'LL DRAIN OUT A PINT OR TWO OF FRESH BLOOD AND DRINK IT DOWN.

NO PROBLEM. EXCEL-LENT! IN FACT...
...EVEN INVIGOR-ATING!

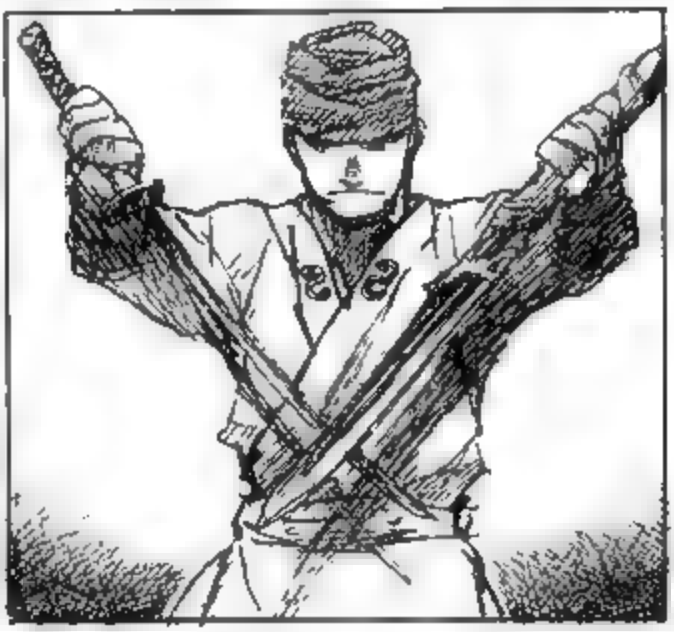
THEN CUT OUT YOUR HEART AND EAT IT.
AND FINALLY, DIG INTO YOUR SKULL AND HAVE A HANDFUL OF BRAINS FOR DESSERT.
ONE OF THOSE OUGHT TO WORK, ANYWAY... I GUESS.
WHO KNOWS HOW FAR I HAVE TO GO?
HEH... kaff
OPTIMISTIC LITTLE BASTARD, AREN'T YOU?
LEMME ASK YOU SOME-THIN'...

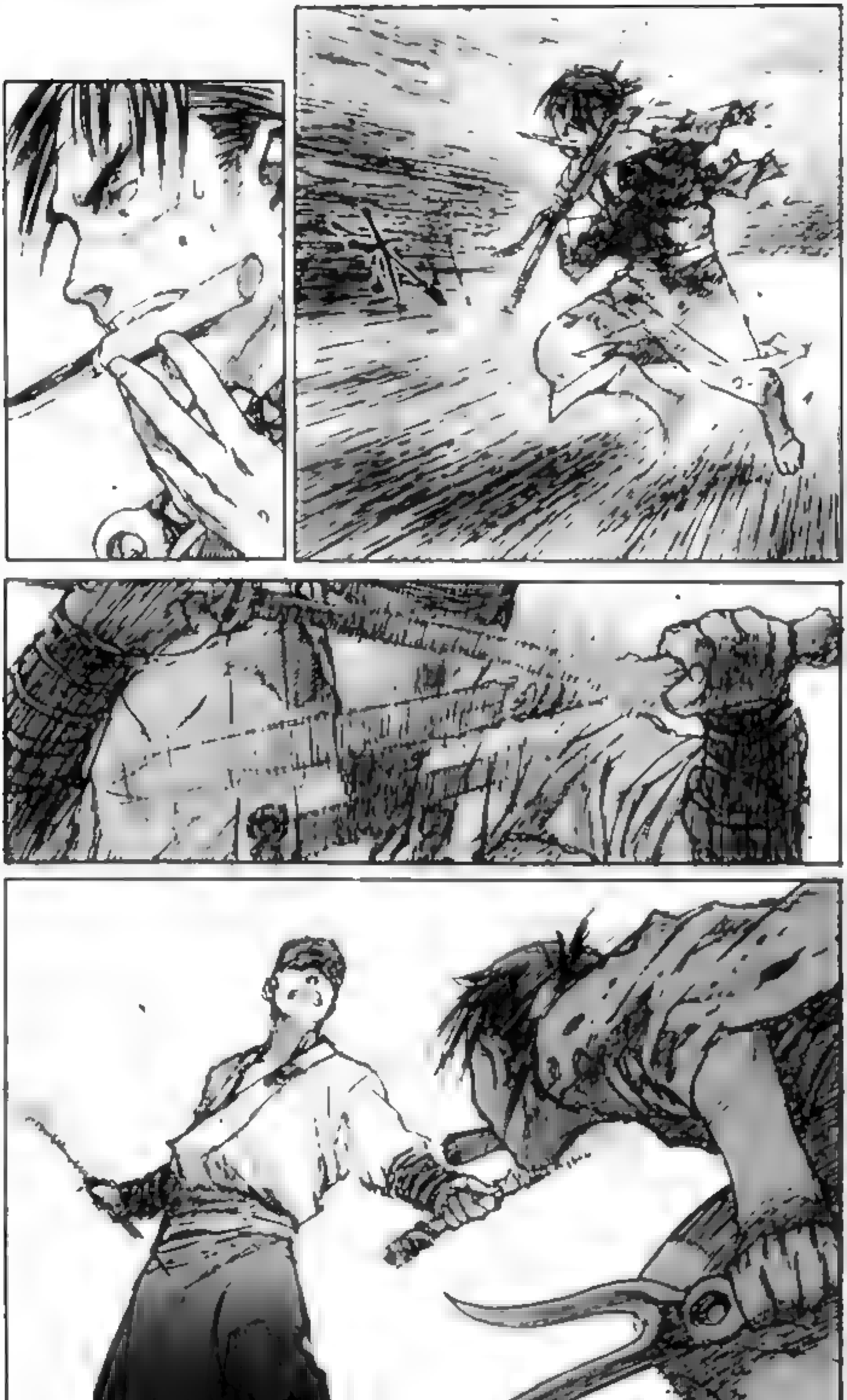
IF YOU SCARFED DOWN A FEW MAGGOTS...
...YOU THINK YOU'D GROW WINGS LIKE A FLY?

ANYWAY... YOU WANT TO DRINK MY BLOOD?
OKAY, THEN-- I COULD USE AN ARM.

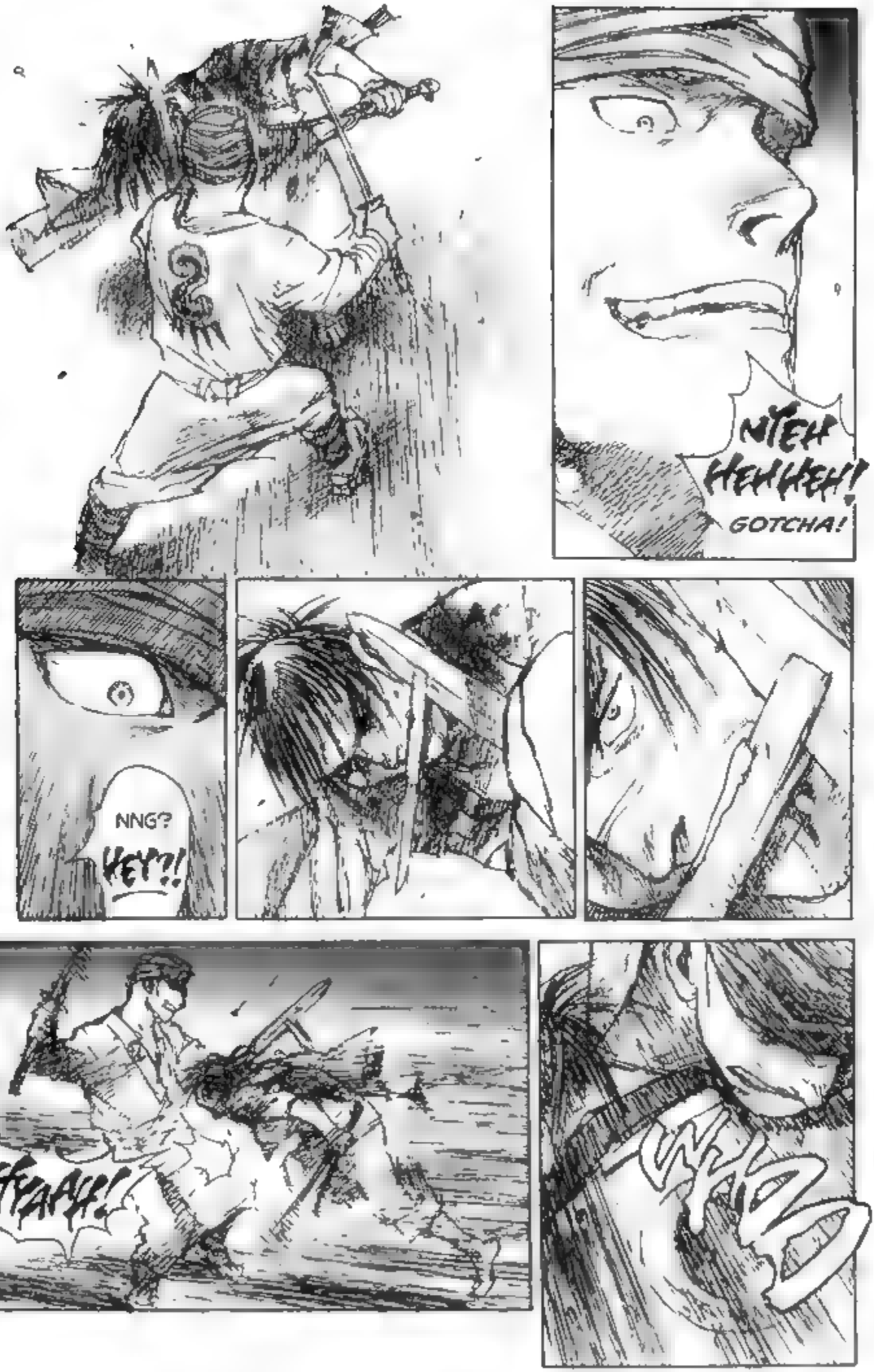
TRADE YA.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING ABOUT BEING "OPTIMISTIC."
IDIOT.





SHING
ONE ARM...
...CAN'T STOP TWO SWORDS, DUMBASS!
GODBOKE


NTEH HEHHEH!
GOTCHA!
NNG?
HEY?!
HYAAH!
UNH

SPLASH!

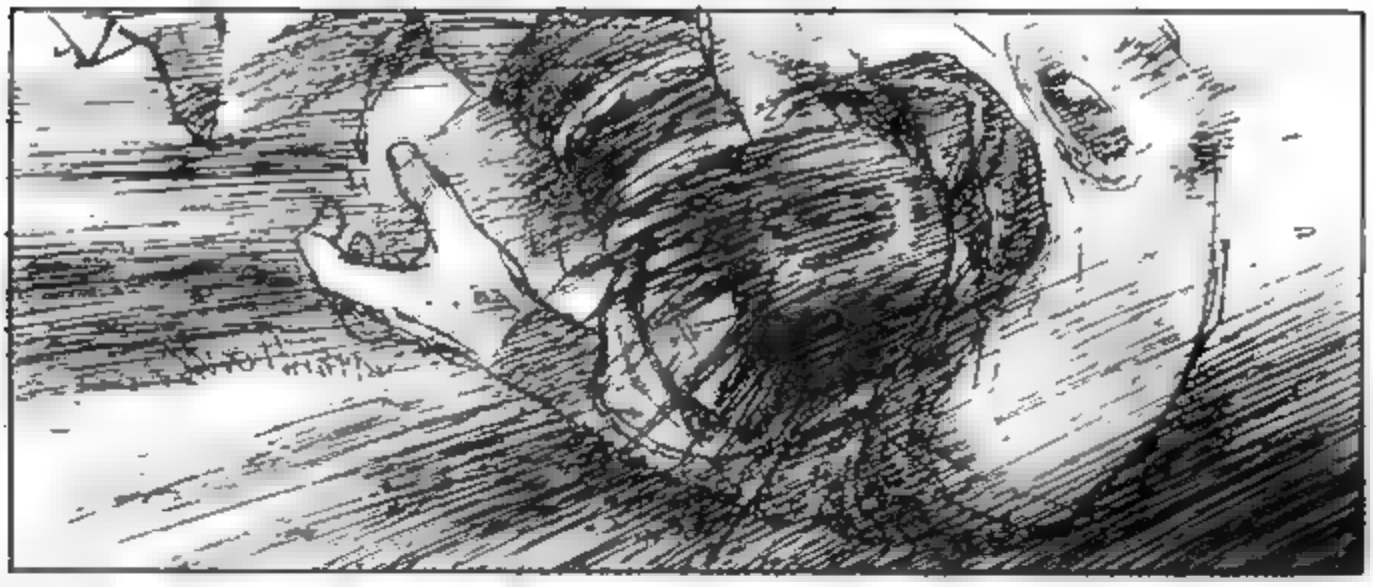
...?!

AAAAAA
GRR
AOO!

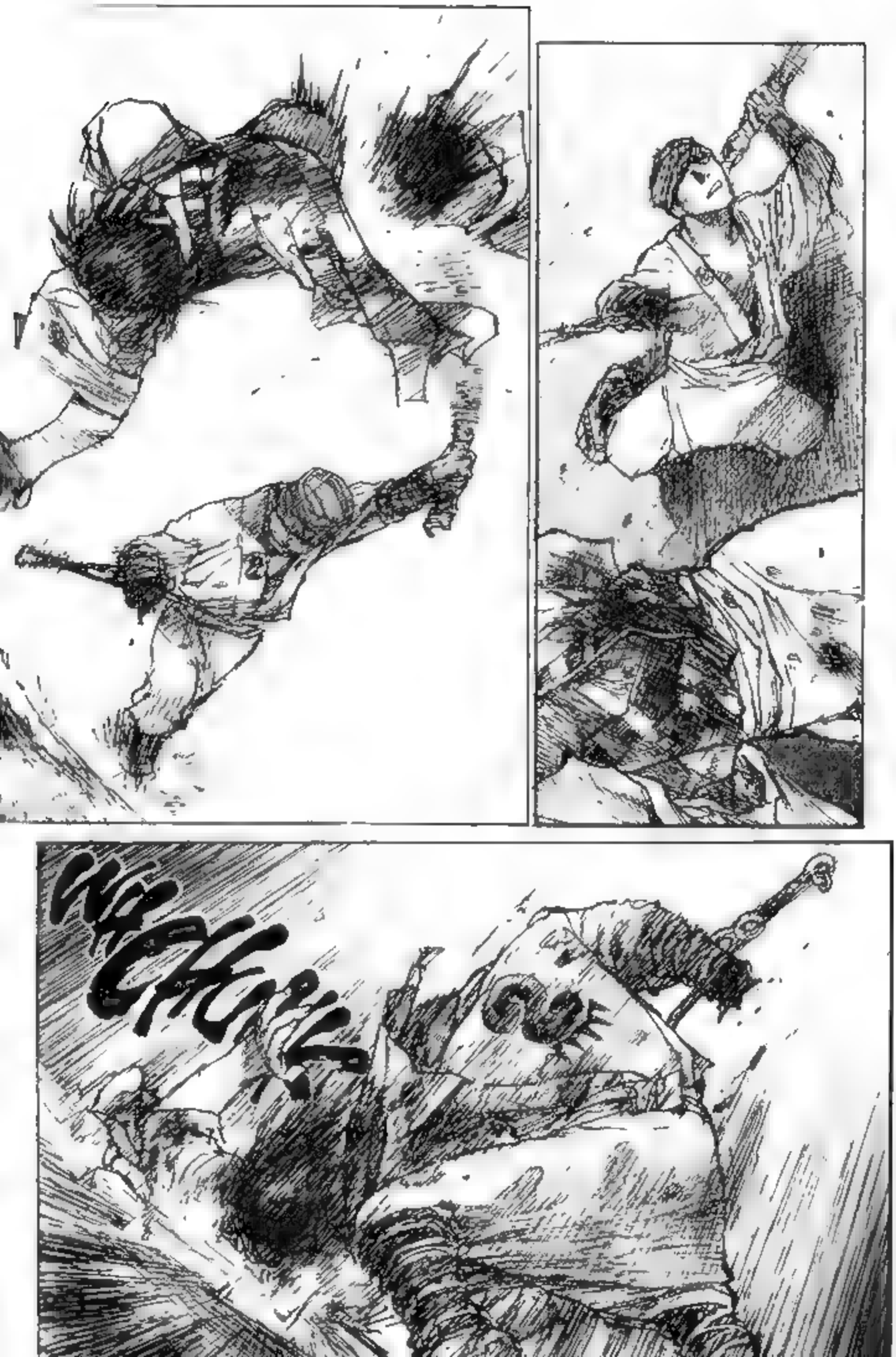
TZG!
AUUGHH!
NNG
AAH!
MAN, LISTEN TO HIM WHINE ABOUT ONE MISERABLE LITTLE HAND!
AND YOU WANT TO BE IMMORTAL, WIMP?
BUDDY, WHEN YOU CAN'T DIE...
...IT CAN GET A WHOLE LOT WORSE THAN THAT!

HAIEE
YAAH!

NNNG
RARRRHR!
AHH.
NNG



HAIEEEYAAA!!


GRRRRR

Splttt
.....
KOFF
hahhh!
hff
hrf
hahhh
GET THIS BASTARD'S...
hff
...HEART... QUICK...
SH- SHIT... BETTER MOVE.

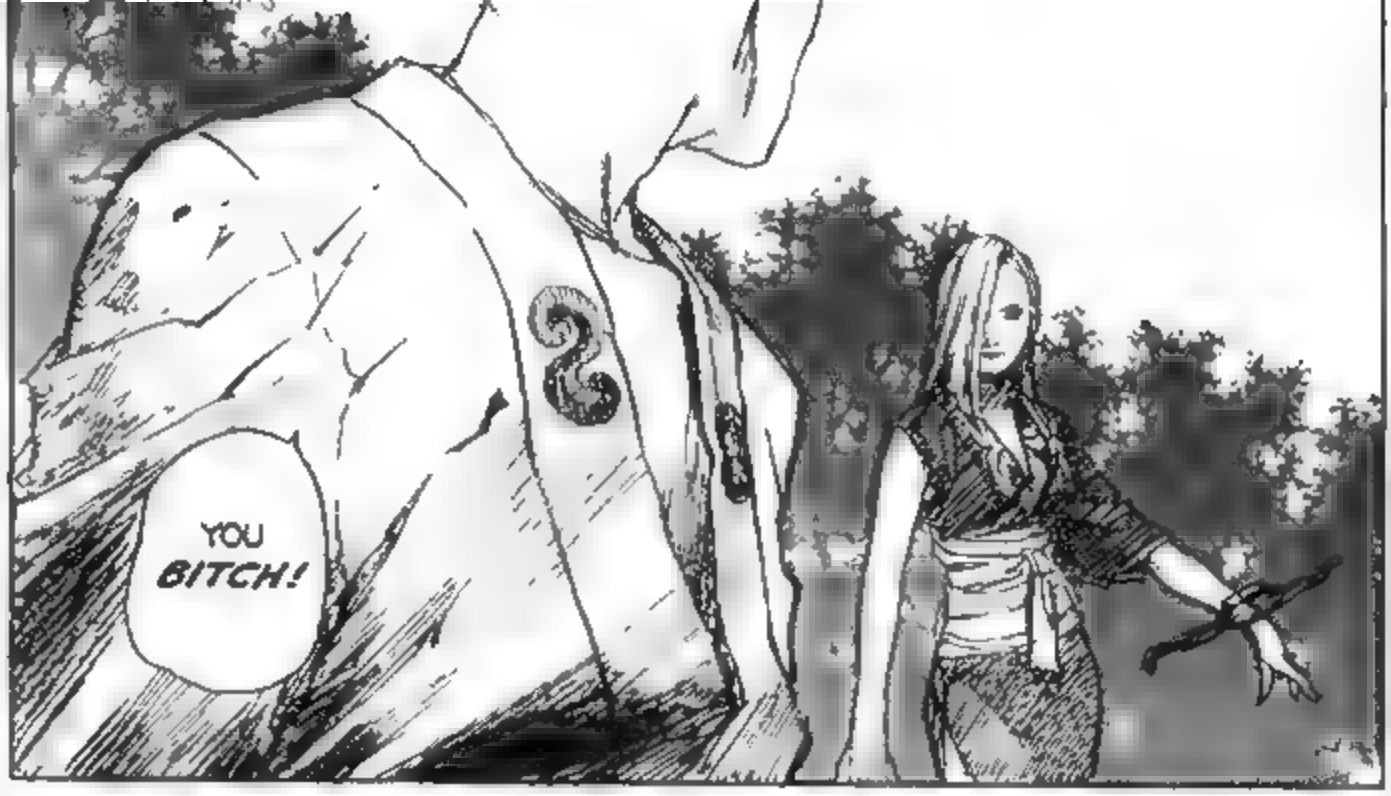
THUD
DOING YOU IN THE *HEAD* FROM BEHIND WOULD BE A LITTLE, WELL...
...*UNCOUTH*, DON'T YOU THINK?
.....
.....
.....?!
WH... *WHO?!*

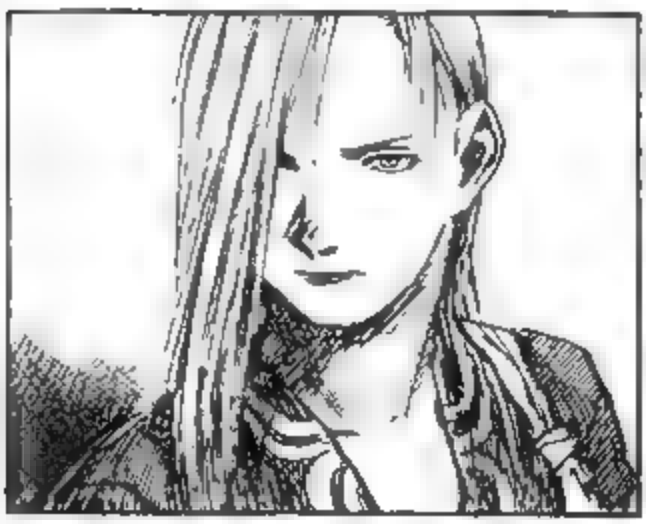
I WAS THINKING OF YOUR *DIGNITY*, YOU SEE? YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL!
THOUGH, OF COURSE...
...*FIVE* OF THESE LITTLE POISONED ARROWS WILL SEND YOU STRAIGHT TO *HEAVEN*.

COMRADES

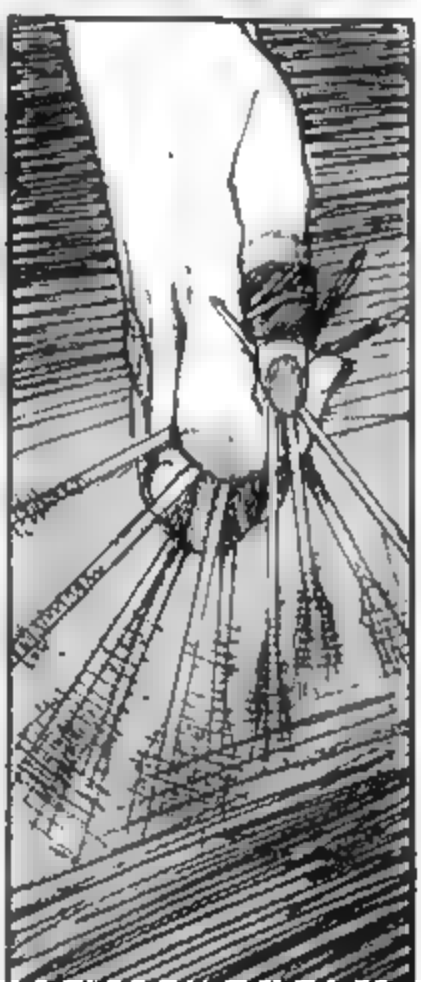
Part 6

.....
.....!
WH...
WHAT...
...DID
YOU
SAY?


YOU BITCH!



BEFORE I COULD TASTE THIS BASTARD'S FLESH, YOU...
...POI-SONED ME?!



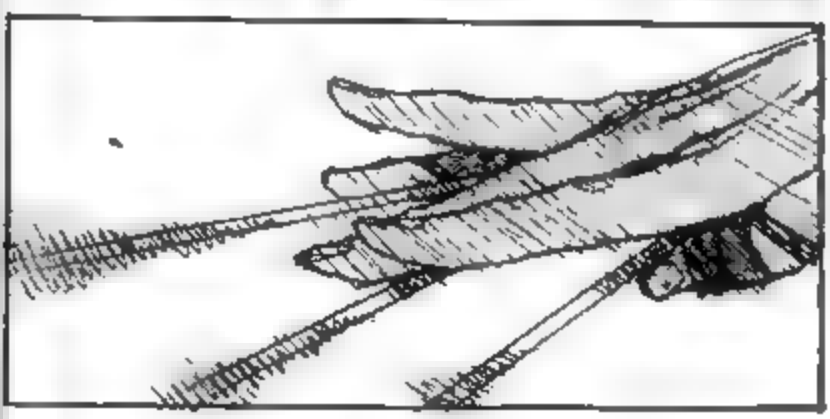
IT AIN'T OVER *YET*, PAL. IF YOU SLICE *ME* UP BEFORE YOU'RE HIT BY FIVE OF *THESE*...
...*YOU* WIN.
A GOLDEN-HAIRED WOMAN...
USING *POISONED ARROWS*...
.....

AH! IT WAS YOU!
YOU SHOT THREE OF MY BUDDIES DEAD ON THE NAKASEN-DŌ ROAD!
"THREE"...?! OH, RATS-- THAT MEANS ONE SURVIVED.
I GUESS I WENT LIGHT ON THE POISON.
HEH... SHIT.
ALL MY PLANS... SCREWED UP BY THIS...
...THIS FRIGGIN' BULL-SHIT.
YOU...
WOMEN LIKE YOU...

THERE'S ONLY *ONE THING* YOU'RE GOOD FOR--
--TO BE *BUTCHERED* LIKE A PIG!!

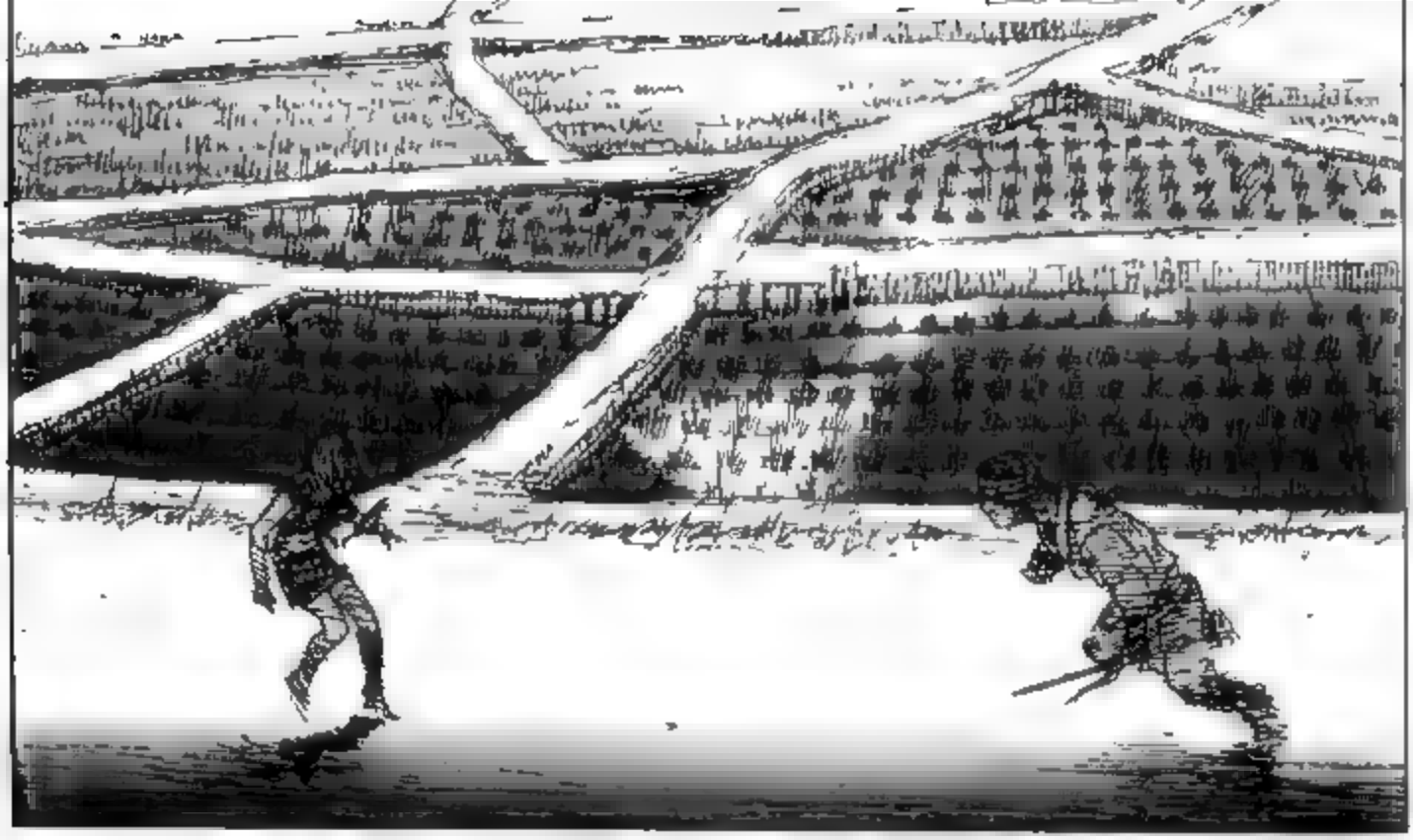
FUGI!

KUZO!

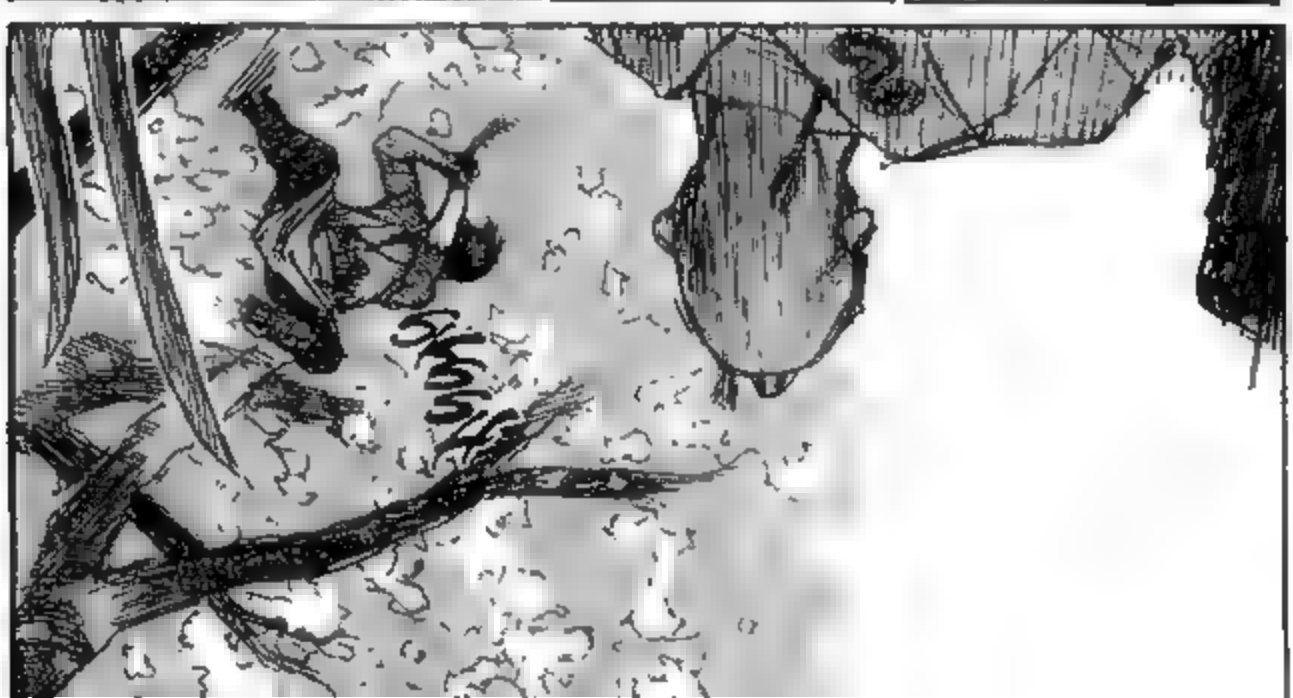


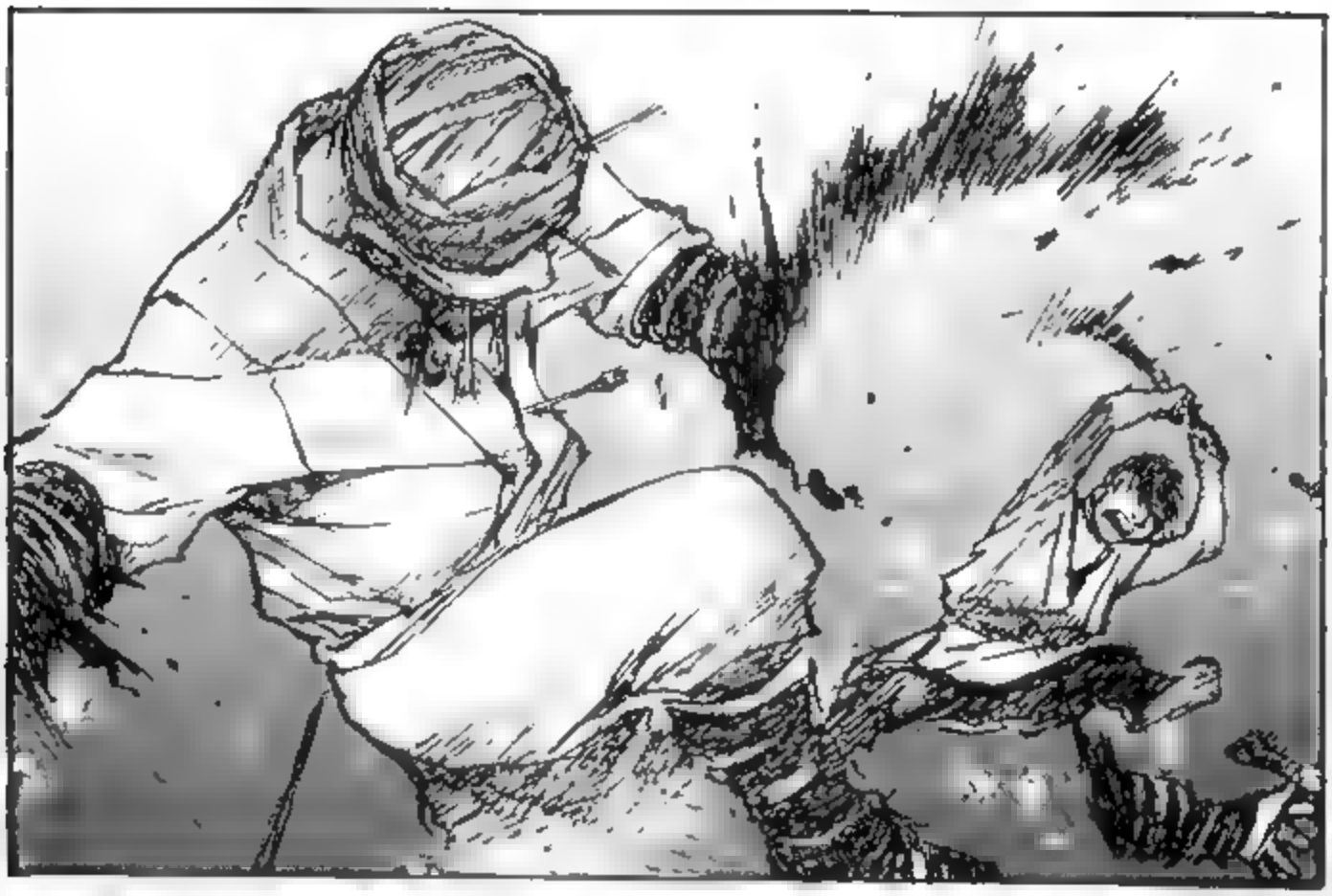
FUCK FUCK FUCK
FIVE!! GAME OVER, PAL!
NOT YET!!

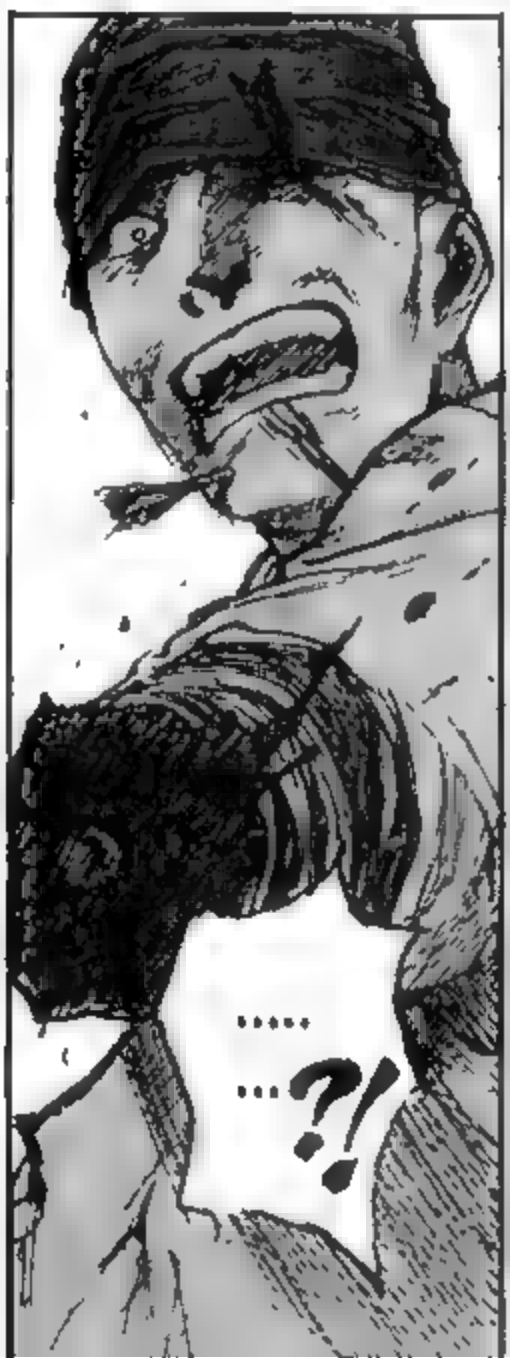
HAIEE YAAH!!



SHIT!


SKSSHH




.....
...?!

HEY...
I DID IT!

HNNG!
S-
SHIT!
NNG...
AUGH...

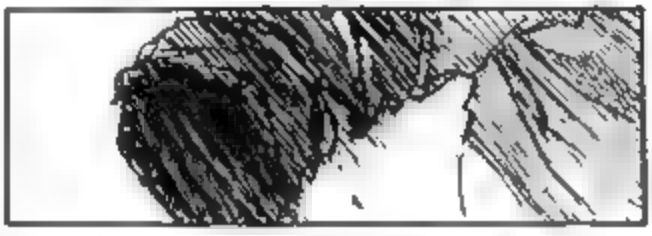
AUUGHH!
I DID IT, HYAKURIN!! ME! DIDJA SEE? PRETTY COOL, HUH?
HE'S ISN'T DEAD YET! LOOK, YOU DUMB-SHIT!
HUH?
SO? WHAT CAN HE DO WITH NO--

FDD
WUMP
SHINRI-
JI...!

?!?
AAH!

JEEZUZ! GET OFF ME!

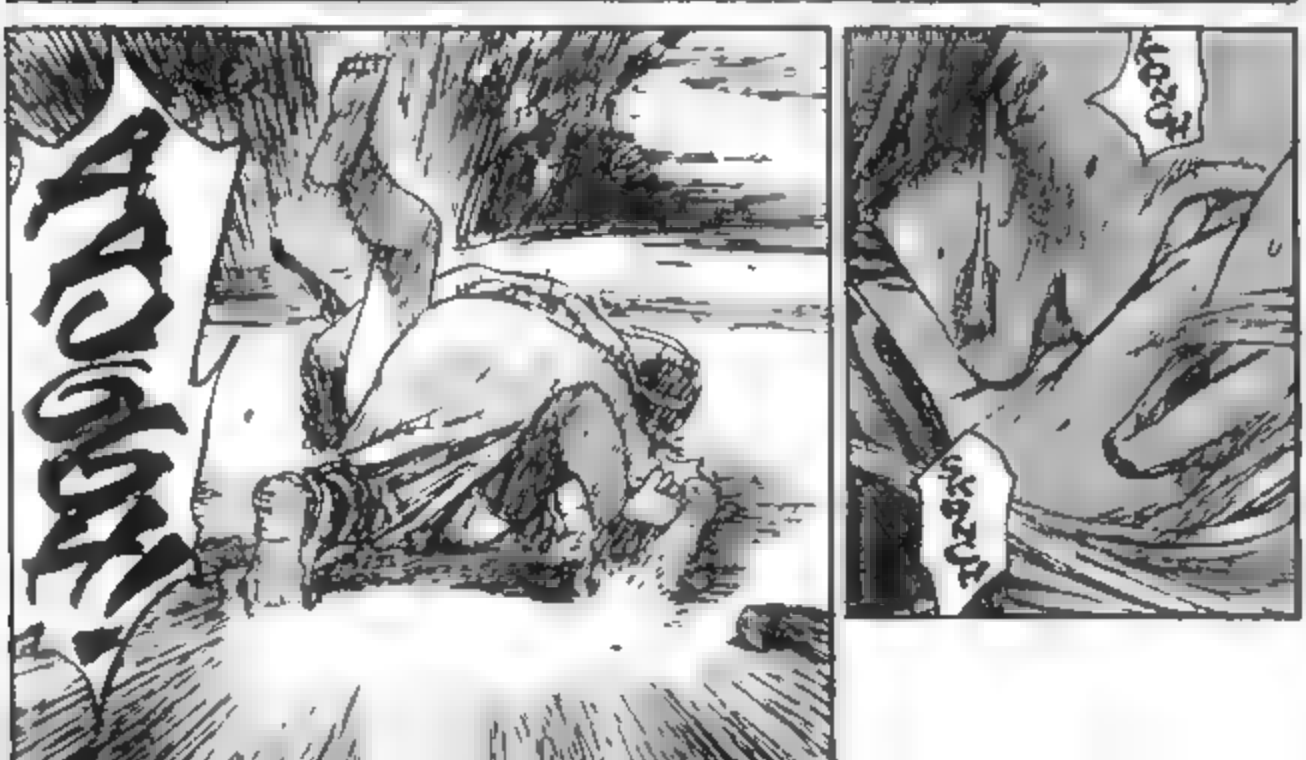
WOULD YOU HURRY UP AND DIE, YOU WEIRD MOTHER-F--



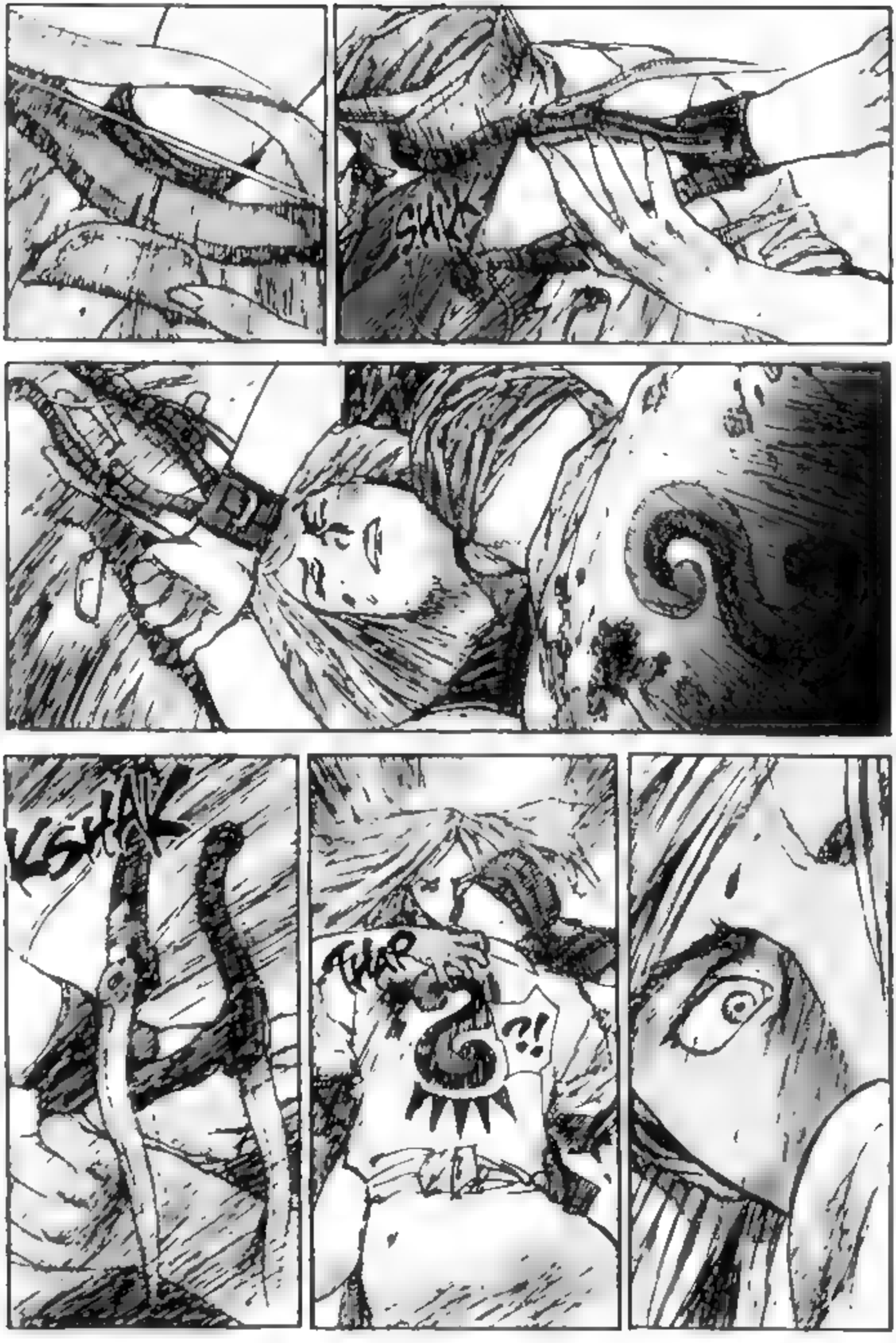
WHAK

ulmg...
.....

AAH!!


AAGGH!
KUCH
SKRUCH

SKRSH
AAAO
OWW!
AGH!
AGH!
AAGHK!
kaff


SHK
KSHAK
?!

GYOKU
.....!
-hahh-
-hnff-
HRGG...

SQUISH
G-GOD DAMN YOU!
DIE!
MMNRR GGH!!
?!

SKRUNCH
Hey Otis!
Shh!
Yes
Mmm
Ahh!
:Haugh!:
:Hrngk:
RRRN
RRRR
RRGH

KICHOKU

HAAGH!!
=spghk!=
?!?
AAH!
N.NGG!
=kof!=
SPLRSSHH
=kof!=
=ahuk=

I'M SORRY.
D-DAMN. MANJI...
IF ONLY I'D BEEN A LITTLE... SOONER.
THIS IS... TOO MUCH. TOO MUCH...
skoff

SHIT, SHIT, SHIT!!
WHY DID THIS... EVERY-THING...
.....
.....
.....
.....?

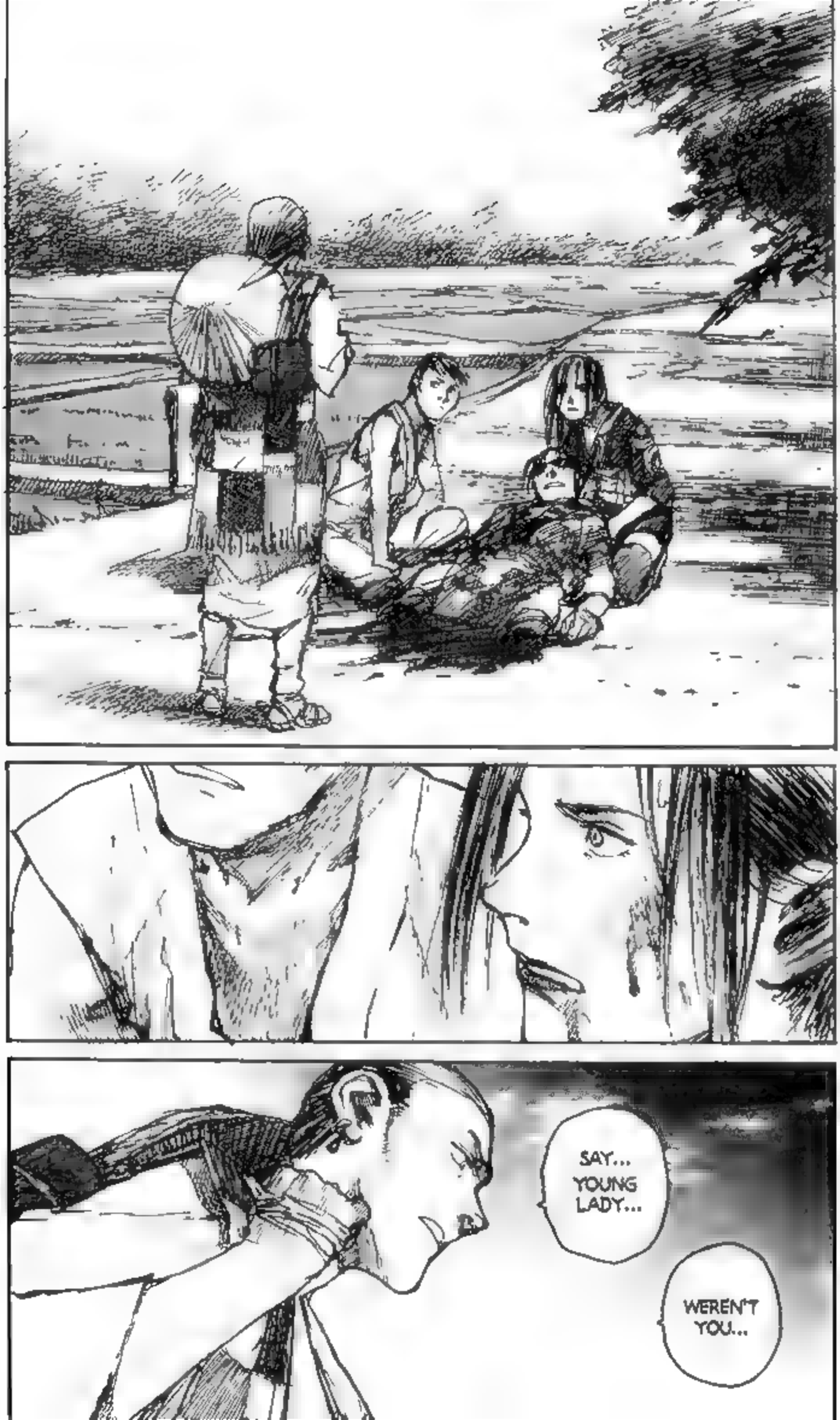
EEEK!
OH MY GOD!! HE...HE'S ALIVE?! WHAT THE F-?!? YUCK!!
H... HEY... CUT IT OUT.
YOU NOT ONLY LOOK LIKE HELL...
...YOU SOUND LIKE IT, TOO... HYAKURIN.
.....
.....
...IN YOUR HEART...
NO... NO WAY! YOU H-HAD A .A SWORD...
NO TIME TO EXPLAIN NOW. LATER.
BUT... BEFORE IT'S TOO... LATE.
GOTTA... ASK YOU FOR SOME-THING.

SOME-WHERE... IN THOSE TREES... RICE PADDIES...
MY ARMS AND LEGS OUGHTA BE... LYING OUT THERE. BRING 'EM...
NO... WAIT A SEC.
BEFORE THAT... GET THE TEGATA...
MANJI!!
HEY, BOSS!!
WELL, WELL... JUST LOOK AT THIS MESS!
OH, THE SHOGUN'S HIGHWAY TOO

?
WHOA.
AND *THIS* GUY ONLY MADE IT THIS FAR, HUH?

HMM.
IF YOU WANT ME TO GO GET HELP...
...I MIGHT CONSIDER IT.
WELL?
??
?!
SAY... DON'T I KNOW YOU...?

RAGE


SAY... YOUNG LADY...
WEREN'T YOU...

...KAKŌ-
SAI'S--
?!
.....
.....
.....!
.....
.....
WELL.
SOME-
TIMES
PEOPLE
LOOK
ALIKE.

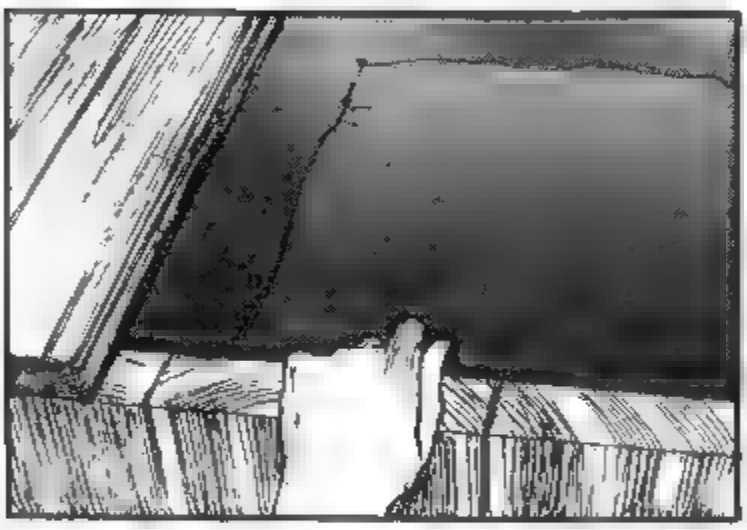
BUT THIS MAN... HE'S REALLY STILL ALIVE?
NOW THAT'S AMAZ-ING...!
HEY... WAIT A SEC... HIM, TOO...
GOOD SIR!
A PASSING STRANGER, UNKNOWN TO US ALL...YET YOU DO NOT IGNORE OUR PLIGHT. YOU STOP TO HELP.
I HAVE NO WORDS TO THANK YOU.

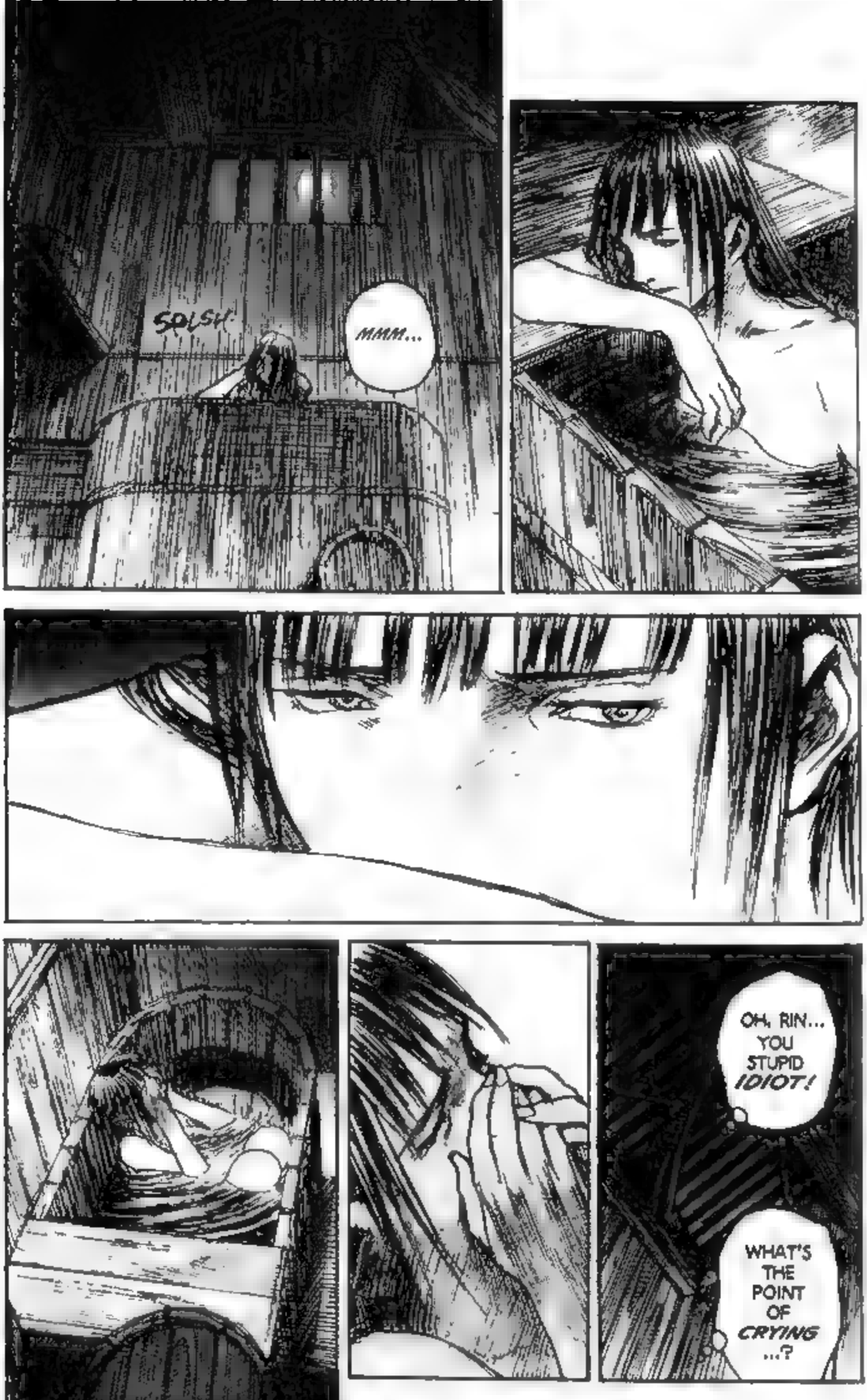
BUT... WHILE IT IS A GREAT IMPOSITION UPON YOU... THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES SUCH THAT THE TWO OF US MUST LEAVE HERE, WITHOUT A MOMENT TO WASTE.
WE HAVE NO TIME TO WAIT WHILE HELP IS CALLED.
AND THEREFORE, UNTIL THIS MAN AWAKES, CAN WE IMPOSE UPON YOUR KINDNESS...
...AND ASK YOU TO STAY BY HIS SIDE?
OF COURSE, AS SOON AS WE REACH A TOWN, WE WILL IMMEDIATELY ARRANGE TO SEND HELP
WHAT SAY YOU?!
WELL, THIS IS TURNING INTO A REAL PAIN.
BUT IT SEEMS I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE.

ALL RIGHT, BUT BE QUICK ABOUT IT.
cumple
TH. THANK YOU.
SHINRIJI! WE'RE OFF!
HUH? OH, SURE!
.....
.....

HEY! JUST WARNING YOU-- IF NO ONE SHOWS UP IN AN HOUR...
...I'M LEAVING HIM HERE!
OVER THERE.
OKAY... SO...

NO MISTAKING THOSE SCARS.
HE'S GOTTA BE LITTLE RIN'S BODY-GUARD.
YEAH. NOW I REMEMBER.
HE'S...
KENJI.
NO, WRONG... GINJI?
IT'S ONE OR THE OTHER. I KNOW IT... NO BIG DEAL. I'LL JUST ASK LATER.



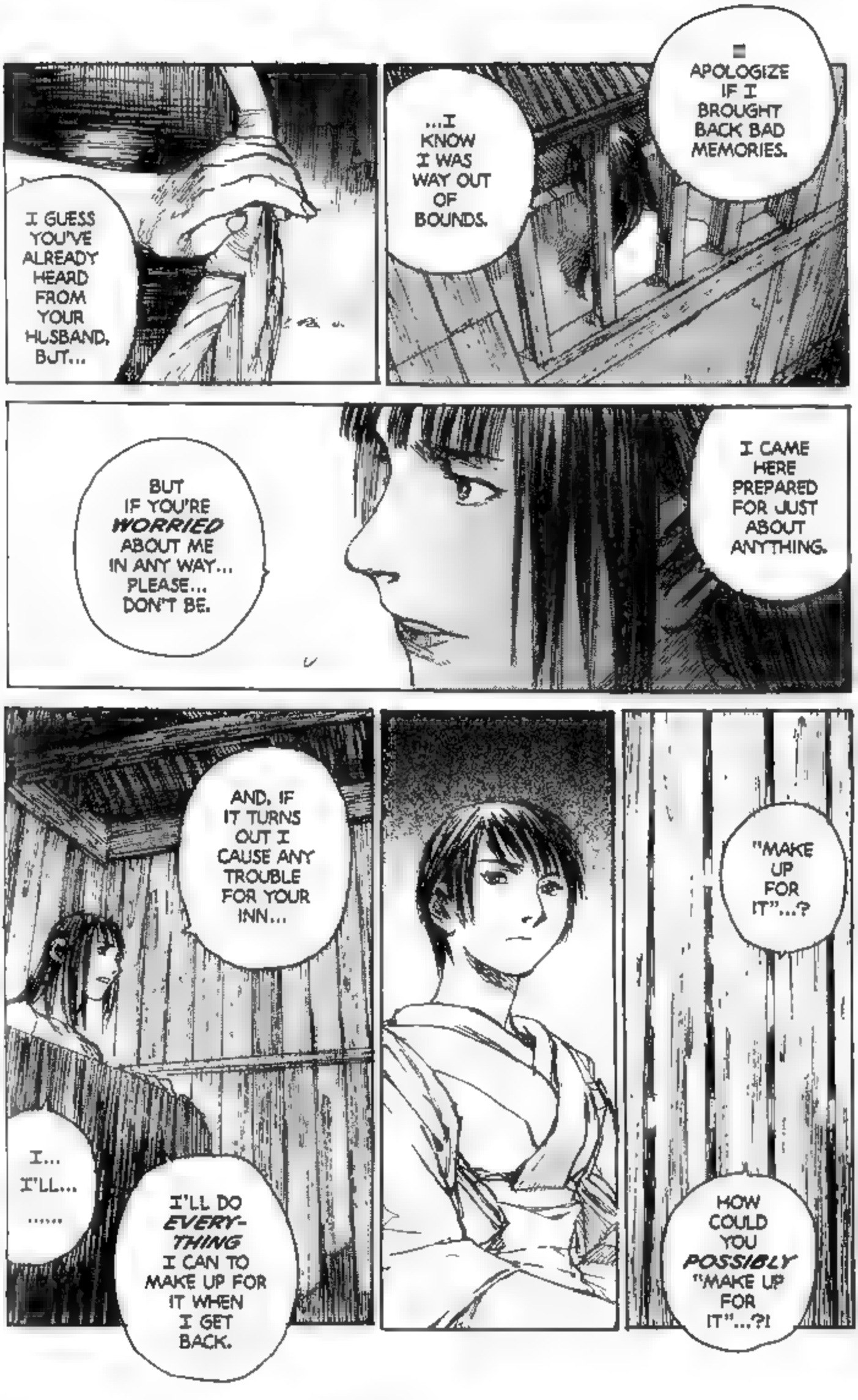

SPLSH!
MMM...
OH, RIN... YOU STUPID IDIOT!
WHAT'S THE POINT OF CRYING ...?

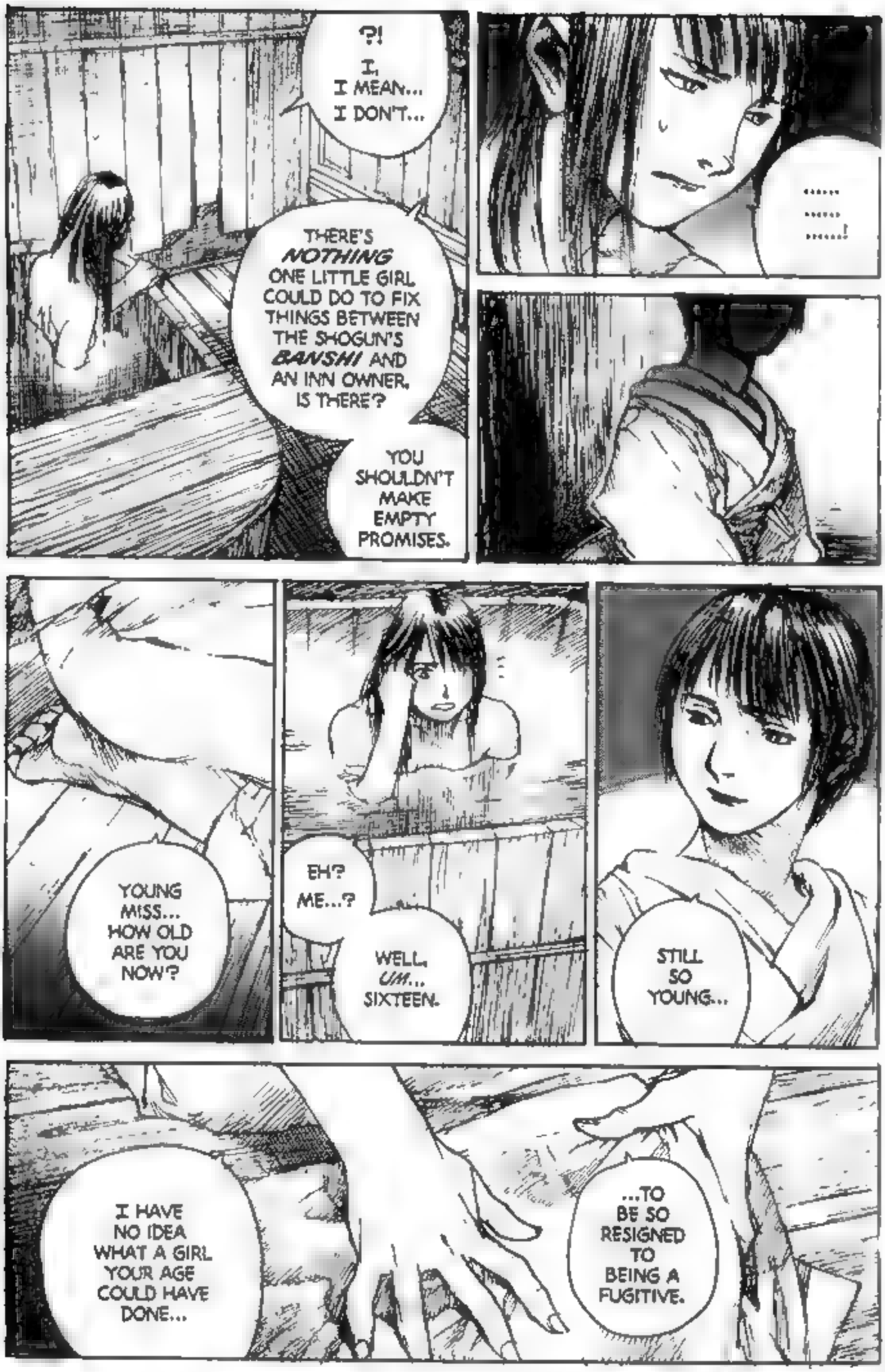
ARE YOU... ARE YOU OKAY, MANJI?
ARE YOU EATING RIGHT?
I HOPE YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING CRAZY...
...TO TRY AND FOLLOW ME.
.....
.....
I... I FEEL... SO ALONE.
BUT... I BET YOU ARE.
SO NOW... MANJI AND I ARE BOTH THE SAME.
WANTED CRIMINALS.

BUT THAT MEANS... WE DIDN'T *HAVE* TO GO SEPARATE WAYS AFTER ALL...
SHAPE *UP*, GIRL.
IF I DON'T STOP THINKING THAT WAY, I'LL NEVER...

HOW IS THE BATH WATER?
I'M LEAVING A CHANGE OF CLOTHES.
UM... THANK YOU.
I'M SORRY THE LARGE BATH WASN'T READY...
OH, NO! THAT'S FINE! I'M THE ONE THAT SHOULD APOLOGIZE!
I MEAN, I JUST WENT AHEAD AND USED YOUR PRIVATE BATH WITHOUT ASKING...
YOU KNOW, DEAR...
...GUESTS DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT.

Y... YES?
ABOUT... YOU KNOW... WHAT I SAID THIS AFTER-NOON...?
UM...


I GUESS YOU'VE ALREADY HEARD FROM YOUR HUSBAND, BUT...
...I KNOW I WAS WAY OUT OF BOUNDS.
I APOLOGIZE IF I BROUGHT BACK BAD MEMORIES.
BUT IF YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT ME IN ANY WAY... PLEASE... DON'T BE.
I CAME HERE PREPARED FOR JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.
AND, IF IT TURNS OUT I CAUSE ANY TROUBLE FOR YOUR INN...
I... I'LL... .....
I'LL DO EVERY-THING I CAN TO MAKE UP FOR IT WHEN I GET BACK.
"MAKE UP FOR IT"...?
HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY "MAKE UP FOR IT"...?!


?!
I, I MEAN... I DON'T...
THERE'S NOTHING ONE LITTLE GIRL COULD DO TO FIX THINGS BETWEEN THE SHOGUN'S BANSHI AND AN INN OWNER, IS THERE?
YOU SHOULDN'T MAKE EMPTY PROMISES.
.....
.....
.....!
YOUNG MISS... HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?
EH? ME...?
WELL, UM... SIXTEEN.
STILL SO YOUNG...
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT A GIRL YOUR AGE COULD HAVE DONE...
...TO BE SO RESIGNED TO BEING A FUGITIVE.

ALL I KNOW IS...
...I'M SICK OF LEADING PEOPLE TO THEIR DEATH.
EVEN IF, FOR INSTANCE, THAT PERSON FACED THE DEATH PENALTY ANYWAY...
...AND I WAS JUST GIVING THEM WHAT THEY DESERVED.
NOT A YOUNG GIRL LIKE YOU.
NOT AGAIN...
SATO-SAN! THAT'S NOT WHAT--
...IT'S BECAUSE... HOW TO PUT IT...?
IF YOU WONDER WHY I'M SAYING THIS...
I'M NOT CONFIDENT ENOUGH ANYMORE.
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT IT'S LIKE?
TO BE UNDER CONSTANT SURVEIL-LANCE?

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS THEY'VE SET UP CHECKPOINTS ON EVERY ROAD BETWEEN HERE AND THE KŌSHŪ BYWAY.
AFTER THAT LAST... INCIDENT... THEY WENT OVER OUR RESIDENCE RECORDS AND FAMILY TREE WITH A FINE-TOOTHED COMB.
IF YOU PRETEND TO BE A RELATIVE NOW...
...THE CHANCES YOU'LL GET AWAY WITH IT ARE FIFTY PERCENT... OR LESS.
PUTTING YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE AT THOSE ODDS?
IT'S THE SAME AS ASKING TO DIE.

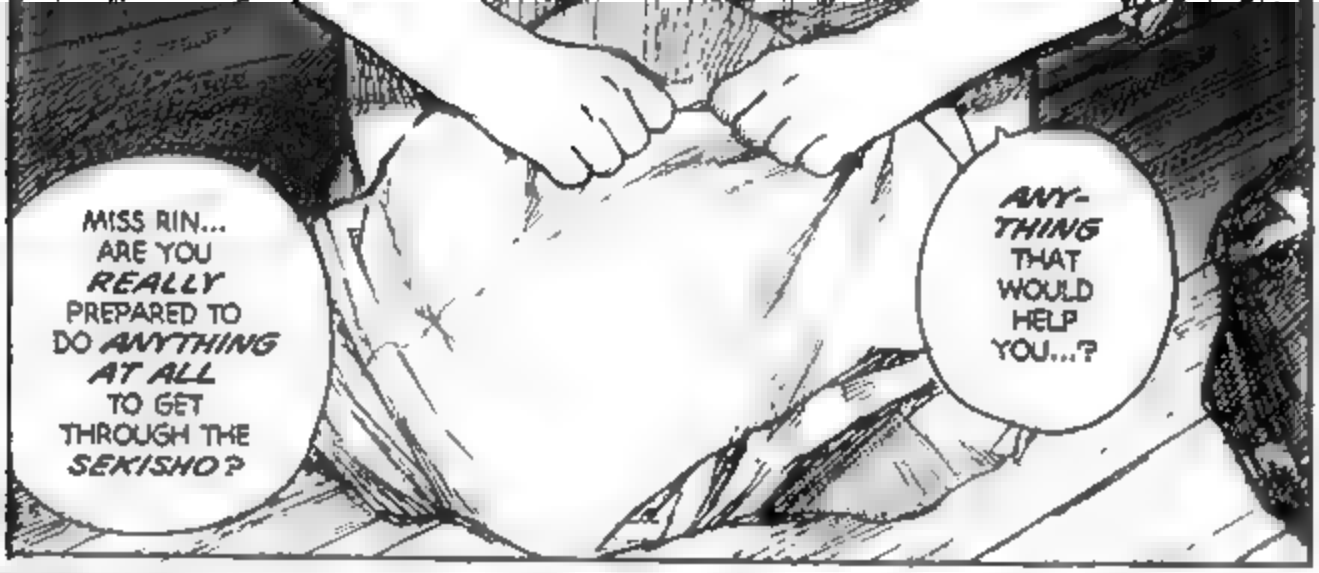
BUT...
...EVEN IF THAT'S TRUE...
I... I *HAVE* TO GO.
DO YOU MIND IF I TELL YOU SOME-THING...?
FOR TWO WHOLE YEARS, I'VE BEEN CHASING *ONE* MAN...
...*MY PARENTS' MURDERER.*

IN THE BEGINNING, IT WAS ALL SO VAGUE... I JUST FIGURED I COULD DO IT SOMEHOW.
ALL BY MYSELF.
BUT ONCE I WAS ON THE ROAD...
...I LEARNED. QUICKLY.
JUST HOW POWER-LESS I WAS.
I...
I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING WITHOUT DEPENDING ON OTHER PEOPLE'S HANDS.
OTHER PEOPLE HAVE SPILLED BLOOD FOR MY VENDETTA... BUT NEVER ME.
"EVEN THAT WANTED POSTER... I DIDN'T KILL THOSE PEOPLE. BUT...
"BUT YOU COULD SAY IT ALL STARTED BECAUSE I WAS WEAK.

"IN THE END... I WAS BRANDED A MURDERER.
"AND I HAD TO JUST ACCEPT IT. BECAUSE OF MY OWN INADEQUACIES."
BUT NOW...?
NOW I CAN'T DIE!
MY MURDERED PARENTS...
THE PEOPLE WHO'VE PUT UP MONEY FOR MY VENDETTA... THE PEOPLE WHO'VE SHELTERED ME, EVEN KNOWING I WAS ON THE RUN... AND ABOVE ALL...
"THE MAN WHO HAS SHED HIS OWN BLOOD TO PROTECT ME.
"I HAVE TO SHOW THEM ALL."
SHOW THEM THAT I MEAN IT.
SO IT HAS TO BE ME...
...SLICING THROUGH THAT MAN'S CHEST WITH MY SWORD!

HUH... I TALK SO BIG. THE TRUTH IS HE'LL PROBABLY KILL ME BEFORE I EVEN TOUCH HIM.
I *KNOW* THAT'S ALL I CAN EXPECT.
BUT EVEN SO...
I'M TERRIFIED OF GOING THROUGH THE CHECK-POINT...
I MEAN, *OF COURSE* I AM! BUT IF I ABANDON THE CHASE...
FOR ME THAT MEANS...
...ABAN-DONING MY REASON FOR *LIVING.*
I DON'T WANT TO BE ARRESTED BEFORE I'VE FACED HIM.
SATO-SAN...

THOSE PEOPLE YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND HELPED BEFORE...?
THERE MUST HAVE BEEN ALL KINDS.
BUT ALL OF THEM...
...ALL OF THEM CAME READY TO WALK THROUGH DEATH... SO THEY COULD LIVE.
EVEN THAT POOR GIRL WHO DIED...
...IF SHE'D KNOWN HER CHANCES WERE WORSE THAN FIFTY PERCENT...
I BET SHE STILL WOULD HAVE KNOCKED ON YOUR DOOR.
EVEN SO.

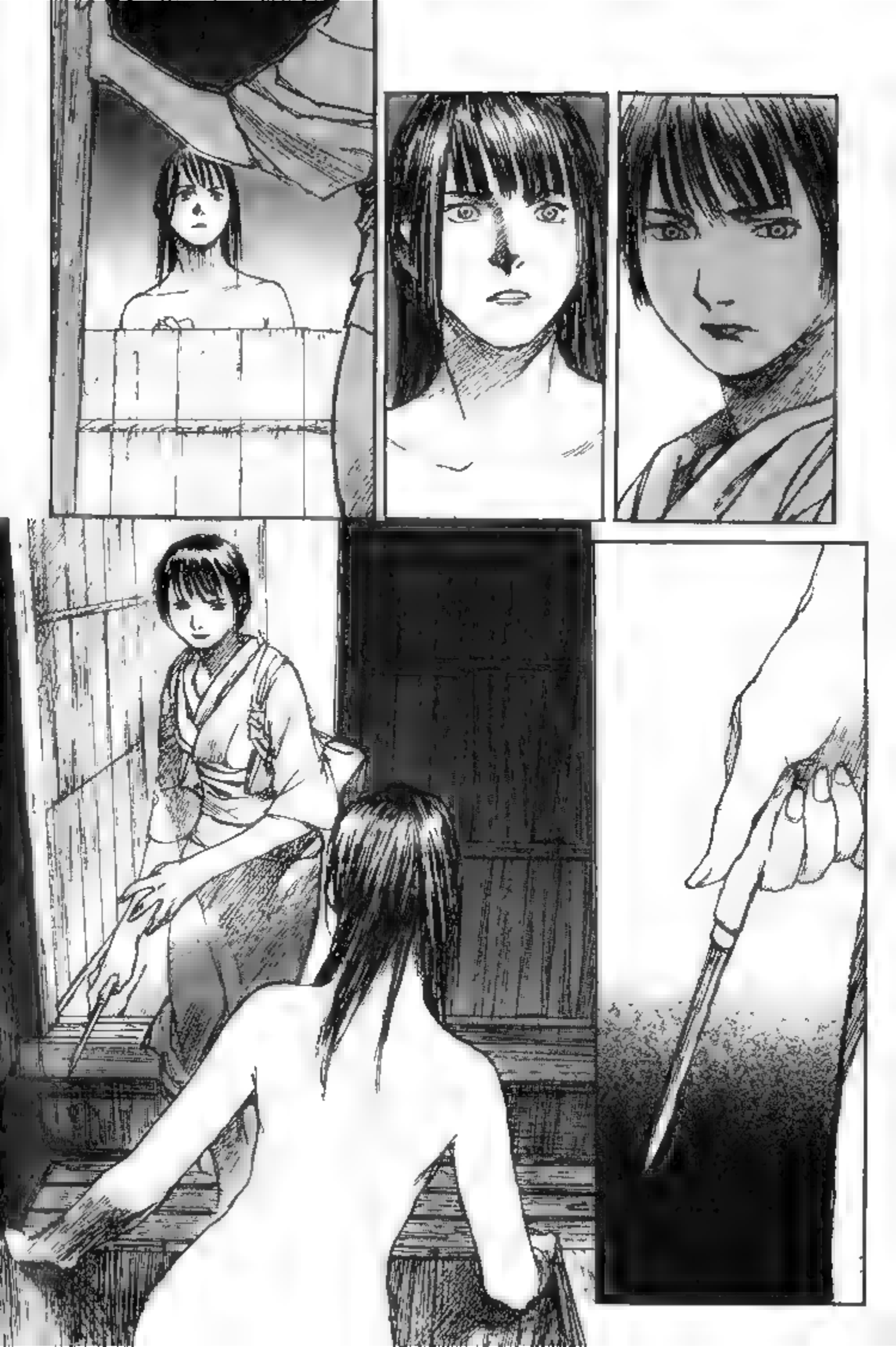

MISS RIN... ARE YOU *REALLY* PREPARED TO DO *ANYTHING AT ALL* TO GET THROUGH THE *SEKISHO?*
ANY-THING THAT WOULD HELP YOU...?

?!
WELL...? PLEASE ANSWER.

Y- *YES!* OF *COURSE!*

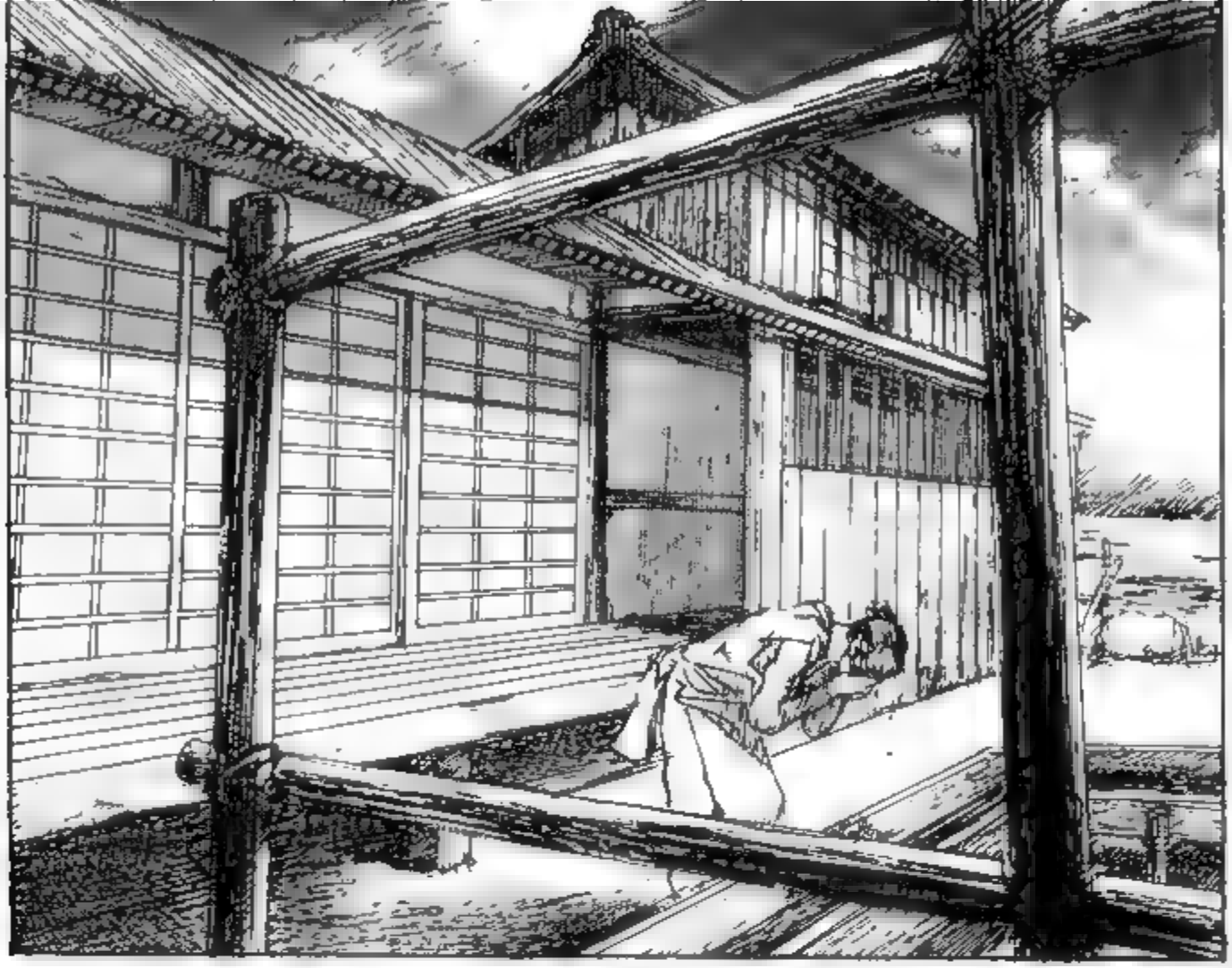
.....
I SEE.
THEN... DON'T FORGET YOUR *ANSWER.*

.....
.....?



WHA-?!
SATO-SAN!
I'M SORRY.
BUT YOU CAN'T CROSS THIS BRIDGE ON WILLPOWER ALONE!

CLOUDBURST
Part 1



phewww

NICE WEATHER, FOR SURE...
OH, WELL...
!
YO!
ER... G-GOOD MORNING...

WHAT'S WRONG? YOU GOT THE RUNS OR SOME-THIN'...?
HUH? OH, NO! IT'S JUST... I DIDN'T SLEEP MUCH. TOO NERVOUS...
NOW THAT'S NO GOOD!
OH, I'M OKAY, REALLY. BUT...
REMEMBER WHAT YOU PROMISED LAST NIGHT...?
ABOUT TODAY...?
WELL, UH... YEAH. I SAID I'D TAKE YOU FOR SURE IF THE DAY DAWNED CLEAR.
AND DAMNED IF IT AIN'T A NICE ONE.
TRUTH IS, I STILL WASN'T GONNA DO IT IF THE OLD LADY RAISED A FUSS.
BUT WE WAKE UP THIS MORNING, AND SHE'S LIKE, "SUIT YOURSELF." GO FIGURE.
.....
.....

UH... MISS RIN...?
?
THAT.

A COUNTRY INNKEEPER'S SISTER-IN-LAW WITH A SWORD HANGIN' OFF HER SHOULDER...?
THAT JUST AIN'T GONNA FLY.
...?! AH!
OF... OF COURSE! BUT...
WHY NOT PARK IT HERE?
ONCE YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'LL BE, WE'LL SEND IT TO YOU. HECK, IT'S AIN'T LIKE YOU'RE OFF TO KAGA TO CHOP UP SOME POOR SLOB...RIGHT?
UM... HA, HA... RIGHT.
OKAY, THEN. I'LL LEAVE IT HERE.
THANKS.

.....
.....
G-GOOD MORNING.
'MORNING.
??
WHAT'S *THAT*, DEAR?
WHAT'S IT LOOK LIKE?
SHE WON'T GET THROUGH THE *SEKISHO* LUGGING *THIS*.

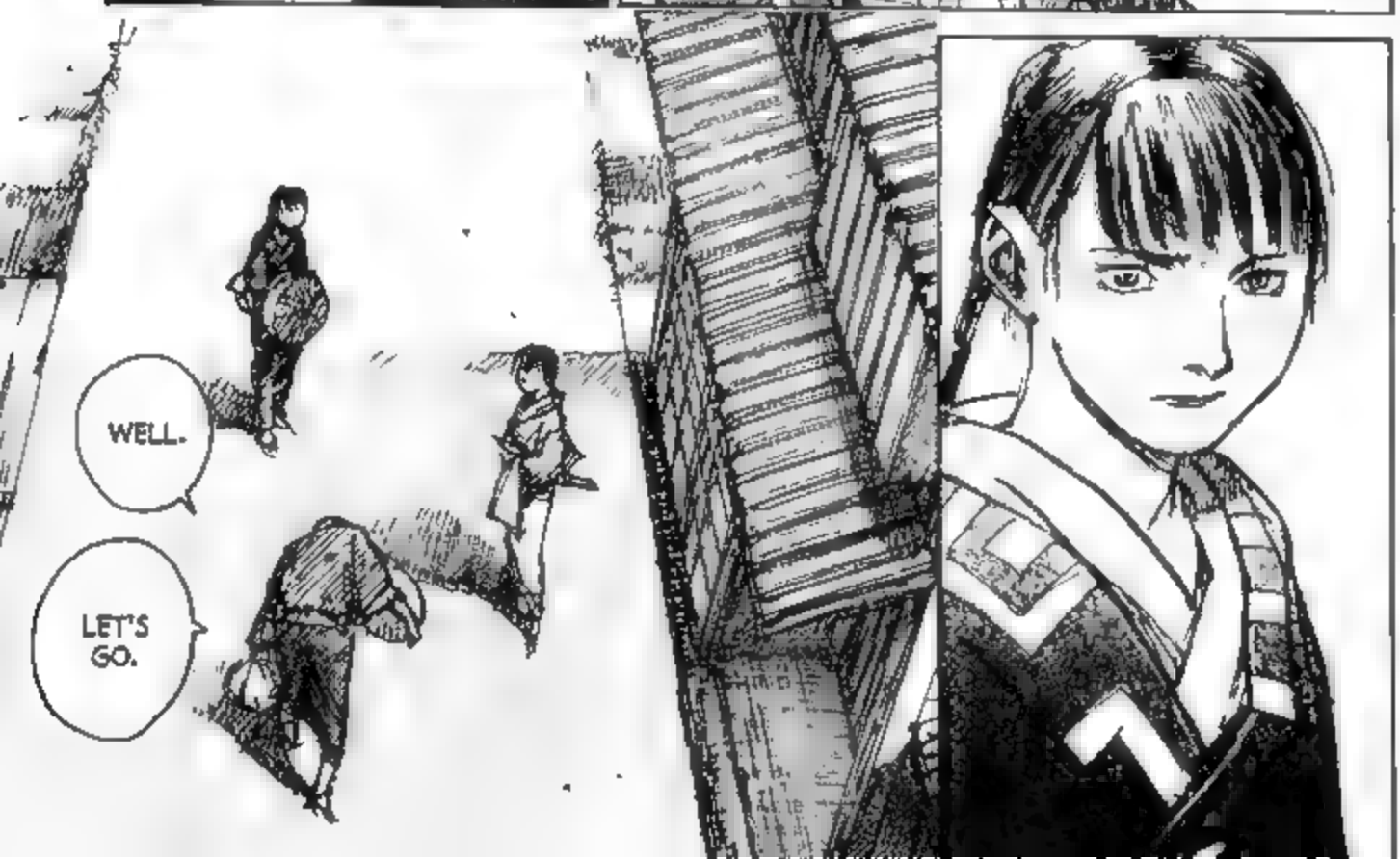
BUT...
.....
YOU'RE OKAY WITH THAT?
??
HUH?
.....
YES. IT'S FINE.
I... I THINK.
REALLY...?
IN THAT CASE... I'LL TRUST YOU.

HERE. TAKE THIS.
SINCE YOU DIDN'T HAVE TIME FOR BREAKFAST
AH...EH?! OH! TH-THANK YOU! THANK YOU SO MUCH!
I'LL TAKE THAT, SŌHACHI.
OKAY, OKAY.
EAT THEM AFTER YOU'RE THROUGH THE SEKISHO, ALL RIGHT?
?? UM... SURE. I WILL!
AND...
I'LL ASK AGAIN, JUST TO MAKE SURE.
YOU CAN'T USE THE BACK WAY. AND AFTER LAST TIME, WE HAD TO GIVE THEM COPIES OF OUR FAMILY TREES. IT WON'T BE EASY TO PASS HER OFF AS A RELATIVE.
YOU'RE SURE YOU CAN DO IT?
LOOK, SATO... FAMILY TREES...
...THEY DON'T GOT NO FACES ON 'EM, RIGHT?

AND YOU REALLY DO GOT A SISTER, ABOUT THE RIGHT AGE AND ALL.
ANYHOW, IT'S THE ONLY CARD WE CAN PLAY.

CONFIDENT OR SCARED SHITLESS, IT'S A DANGEROUS BRIDGE TO CROSS...
...NO MATTER WHAT. RIGHT?

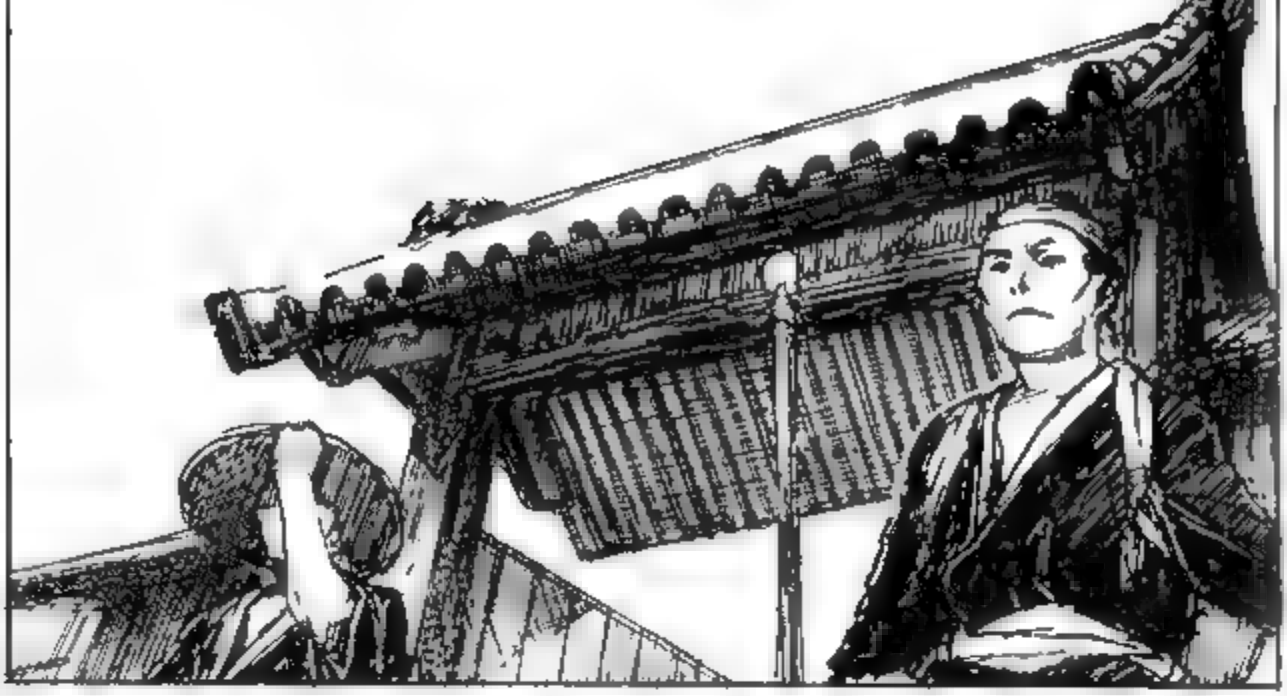
HUH...? UM... YEAH.
WELL. WHATEVER HAPPENS, HAPPENS. WE JUST GOTTA TOUGH IT OUT.

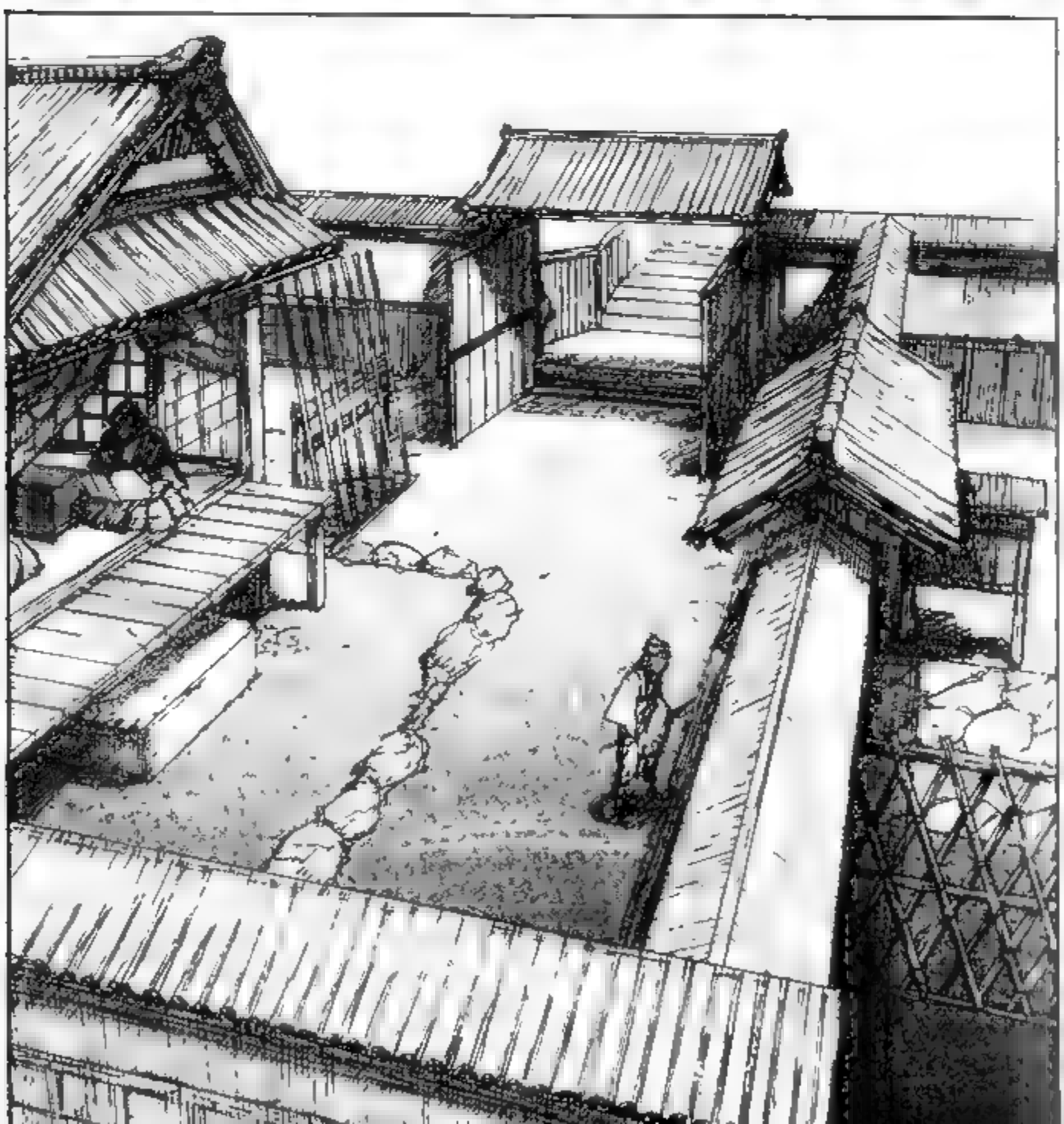

WELL.
LET'S GO.

SATO-SAN...
I...
I... I'M IN YOUR DEBT.
JUST NEVER COME BACK HERE, UNDER-STAND?!
Hmph!
HEY, HEY!
C'MON, SATO! BE NICE!
Y-
YES, MA'AM! I PROMISE!

ER... YOUNG MISS?
YES...?
ALL THAT STUFF I SAID...ABOUT TOUGHING IT OUT AND ALL...?
TRUTH IS... .....
MY HEART AIN'T IN THIS.
WELL... I DIDN'T REALLY THINK SO.
I MEAN... THERE AIN'T NO WAY WE CAN PUT OURSELVES IN YOUR SHOES. BUT...
...GUESS I'VE LOST THE OLD NERVE.
WE'VE TAKEN TWENTY-ONE RYŌ OFF YOU, SURE... BUT YOU'RE SO YOUNG.
IT'D BE A WASTE FOR YOU TO DIE... A REAL WASTE.

LOOK...IF THINGS SHOULD... GO WRONG... PROMISE YOU WON'T...um... COME BACK TO HAUNT US?
AH HA HA ha...
I PROMISE, MISTER NAKAYA!





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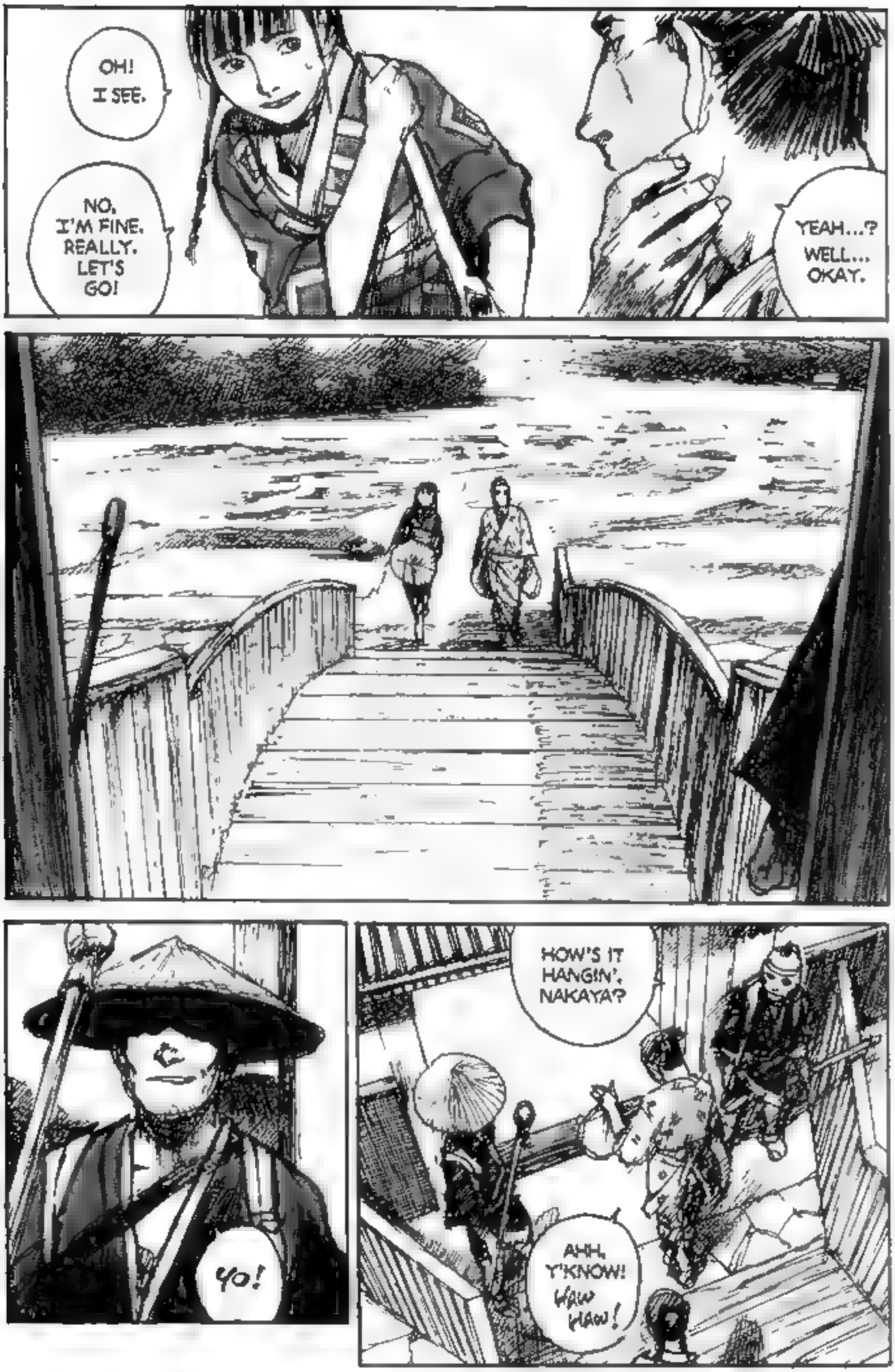
.....!

LOOK--- HOW SCARED ARE YA?

A... A BIT.


OH! I SEE.
NO, I'M FINE. REALLY. LET'S GO!
YEAH...? WELL... OKAY.
YO!
HOW'S IT HANGIN', NAKAYA?
AHH, Y'KNOW! HAW HAW!

W-WAIT A SEC! MISTER NAKAYA?!
HUH?
THAT WAS *INCREDI-BLE!* THAT'S ALL IT TOOK?!
NAW, THOSE GUYS ARE FROM KAMI-NAGAFUSA VILLAGE. THERE'S ONLY FOUR *REAL* GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HERE, SEE...?
THE REST OF THE STAFF ARE LOCALS, PUTTIN' IN TIME.
STILL... THAT WAS *SO* EASY!
YEAH, BUT IT DON'T MEAN NOTHIN', SO DON'T GO BEING ALL IMPRESSED.
THE TOUGH PART'S STILL TO COME...

ER... PLEASED TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
NAKAYA SŌHACHI. IT'S BEEN A WHILE, EH, SIR?

HOH... NAKAYA!
A BIT NIPPY TODAY FOR TH' TIME O' YEAR, AIN'T--
WHO'S THE GIRL?
OH, HER?
SHE'S THE OLD LADY'S LITTLE SISTER, SIR.
BEEN DOING THE SIGHTS FROM EDO ON UP TO NIKKŌ... STOPPED BY TO VISIT ON HER WAY BACK TO MINO.
YOUR WIFE'S SISTER, EH...?
YESSIR!

THEY DON'T LOOK MUCH ALIKE...
...AS SISTERS GO.
OH... WELL, BEGGIN' YOUR PARDON, M'LORD O-BUGYŌ...
THERE AIN'T NO LAW SAYING SISTER'S GOTTA BE "PEAS IN A POD," SIR! HA-HA!
MM. TRUE.
AND SO, NAKAYA-- WHAT IS IT TODAY?
TODAY?! OH, WELL, LIKE I SAID...
THE WIFE'S GOT...uh... "LADY TROUBLES," SEE, AND CAN'T WALK MUCH, SO I'M TAKIN' CARE OF HER LITTLE SISTER FOR HER.

ANYWAY, I FIGURED AFTER I SAW THE LITTLE LADY ON HER WAY TO MINO...
...I MIGHT HEAD OUT TO KANAZAWA FOR A SPELL.
HITTING THE BIG CITY FOR A GOOD TIME WHILE YOUR WIFE'S STUCK AT HOME?
YOU'RE A THOUGHTFUL HUSBAND, NAKAYA!
HEH HEH HEH!
AND SO... ANY-WAY...
I WAS HOPING MAYBE YOU COULD... Y'KNOW...
MAKE ALLOWANCES FOR THE YOUNG LADY HERE...IN YOUR GENEROUS HEARTS, SIRS.
WELL, NAKAYA.
SINCE YOU BRING IT UP...

...YOURS IS AN UNUSUAL CASE, SEEING AS HOW YOU INTERACT WITH MORE OUTSIDERS...
...THAN THE OTHER VILLAGERS.
WE HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING IT, AND WE'VE COME TO THE DECISION...
...THAT YOU'LL HAVE TO APPLY FOR A *TEGATA* EVERY TIME YOU TRANSIT THIS *SEKISHO*.
H-
HUH?!
ESPECIALLY IN LIGHT OF YOUR...
...*PAST RECORD*.

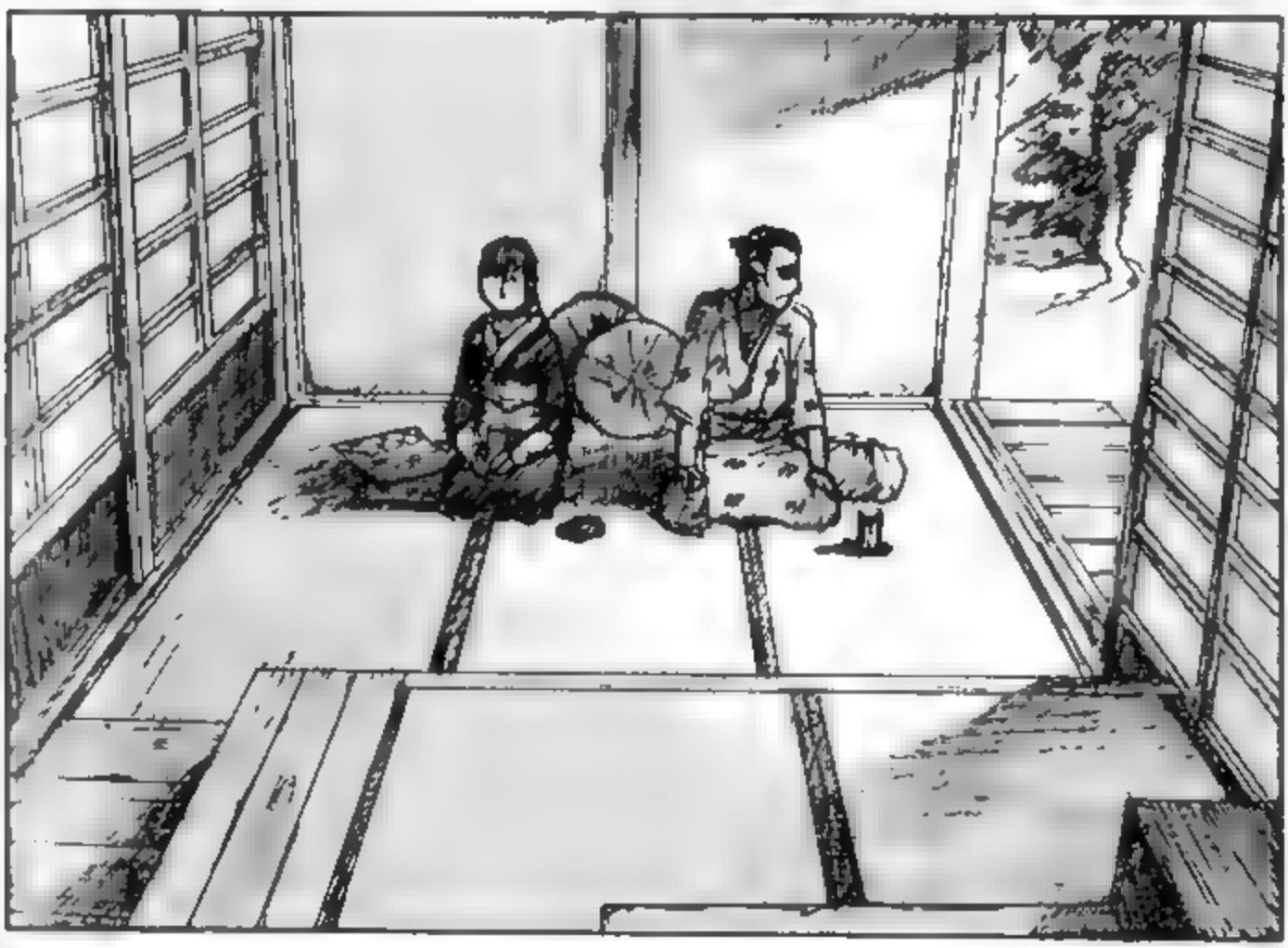
NOW... FOR YOU AND YOUR WIFE...
...ISSUANCE OF THE DOCUMENTATION WILL BE A FORMALITY.
BUT TELL US SOME GIRL WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE IS YOUR WIFE'S SISTER...
...AND YOU CAN'T EXPECT US TO JUST WAVE HER THROUGH. NOT ANY MORE.
I... I SEE.
AW, C'MON, MY LORD!
LOOK...
I GET YOUR POINT, SURE.

BUT IT'S NOT LIKE WE DID WHAT WE DID OUTTA CHARITY, SIR.
SO NOW SOMEONE ELSE HANDS ME A RYŌ OR TWO, HECK... IF THERE'S ANY TROUBLE, YOU'LL SHUT ME DOWN FOR GOOD!
IT'S NOT WORTH A BIT OF EXTRA SPENDING MONEY, NO SIR.
"ONCE BURNED, TWICE LEARNED." LIKE MY GRAMPA USED T'SAY!
HEH, HEH... NAKAYA, YOUR BLUNTNESS BORDERS ON INSOLENCE.
BUT WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE, AND THEREFORE BELIEVABLE.
HOWEVER... THIS IS AN OFFICIAL DECISION. GET USED TO IT.
WHAT...? YOU LOOK RATHER UPSET.
SURELY IT'S NOT THAT BURDEN-SOME...?
.....
.....
.....

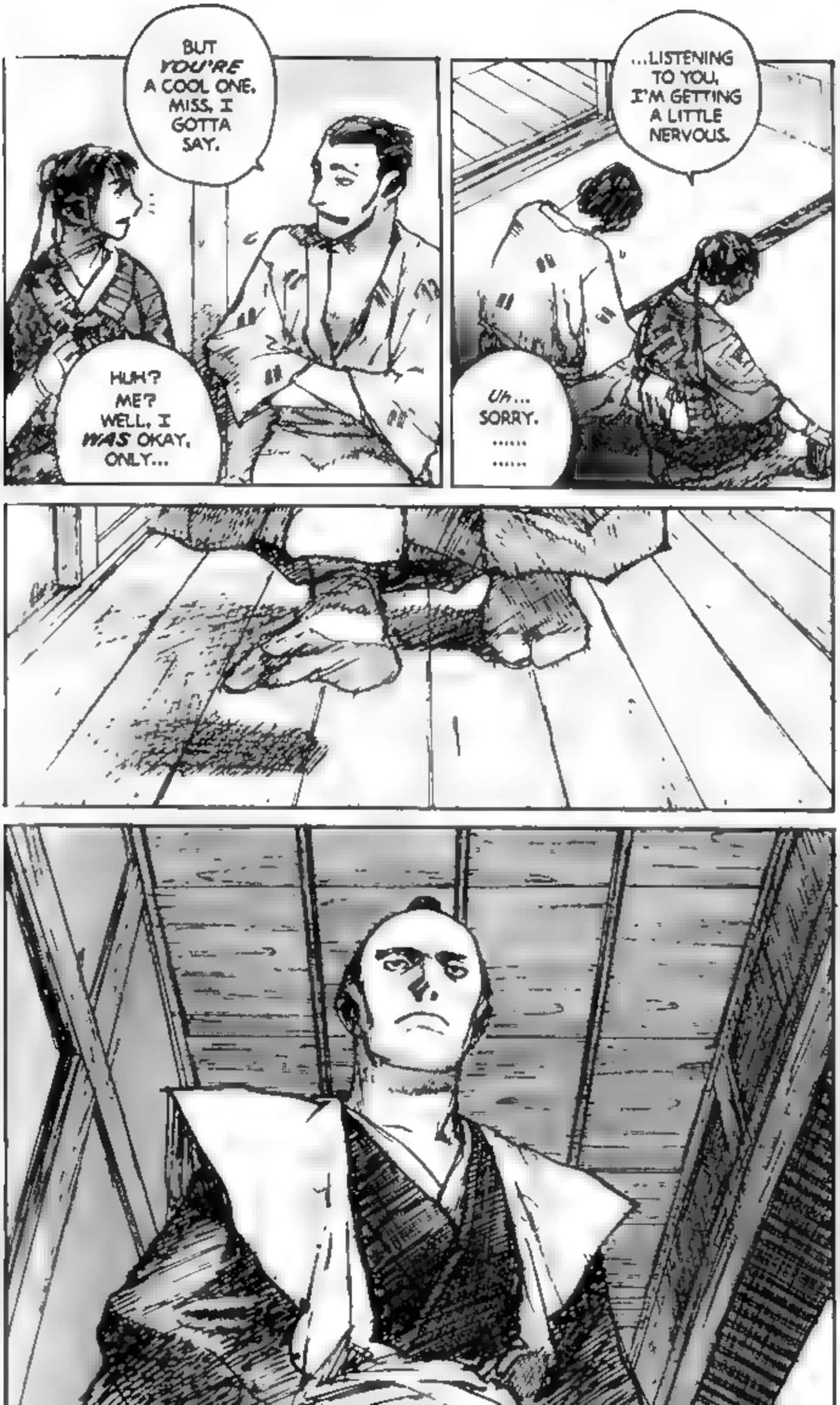
WELL... UM... THEN... O-BUGYŌ, SIR?
WHAT ABOUT HER...?
HMM.
WELL, SHE'LL NEED TO GO BACK TO EDO, GET A TSŪKŌ TEGATA AND BRING IT IN FOR INSPECTION. THE USUAL.
BUT... HOW-EVER...
HAVING SAID THAT...
THERE'S FAULT ON OUR SIDE FOR JUST SPRINGING THIS ON YOU WITHOUT PRIOR NOTIFICA-TION.
AND IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT UNFAIR FOR THE YOUNG LADY TO HAVE TO TRAVEL ALL THAT WAY AGAIN... AND SO!

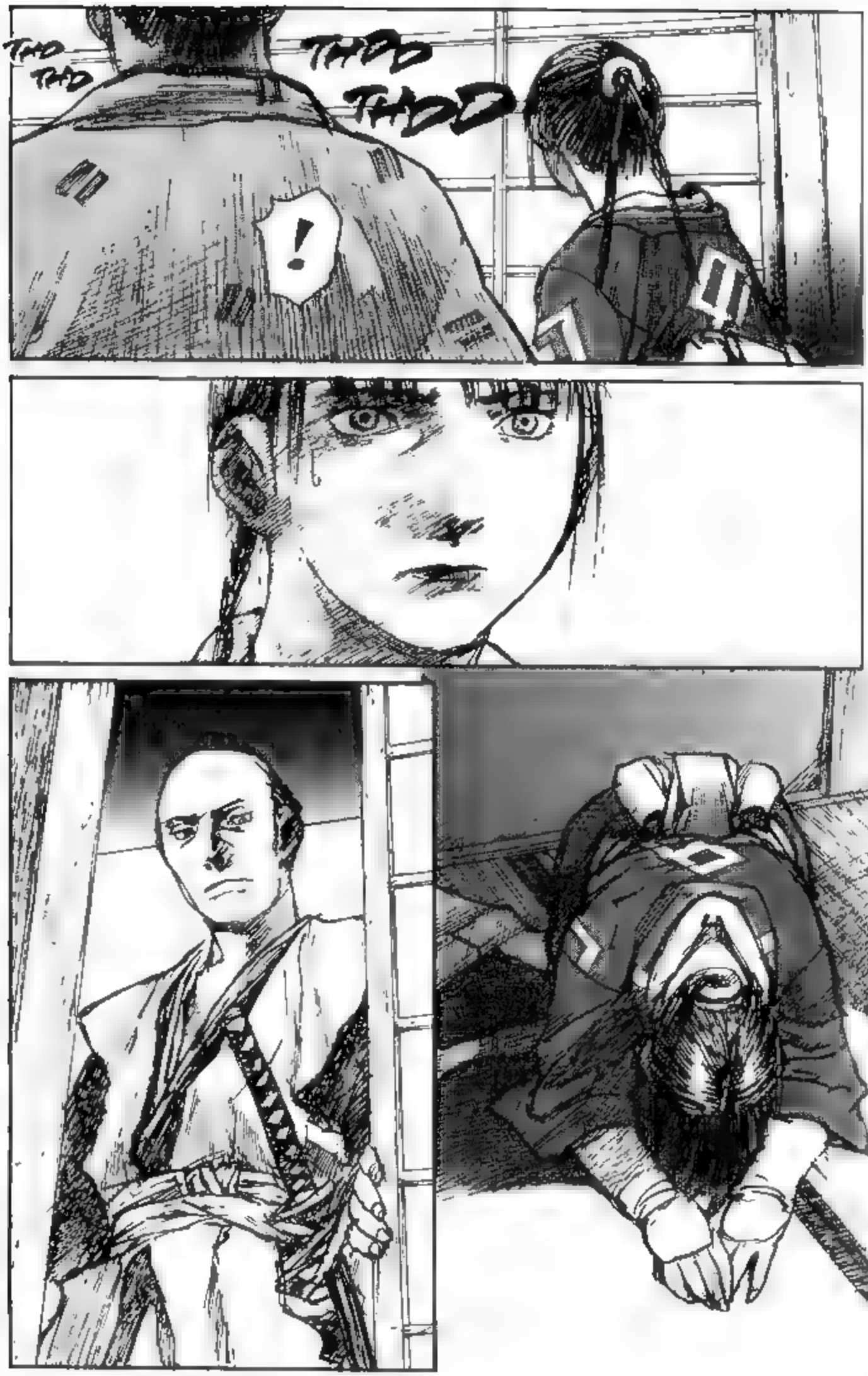
IT SEEMS I'LL HAVE TO LET IT SLIDE THIS ONE LAST TIME.
EH?!
REALLY, SIR...?! THAT'S DARN KIND OF--
BUT!
!
WELL? IS THIS A PROBLEM?
I'D NEED TO ASK YOU A FEW QUES-TIONS!
IN PLACE OF A TEGATA... YOU, GIRL!

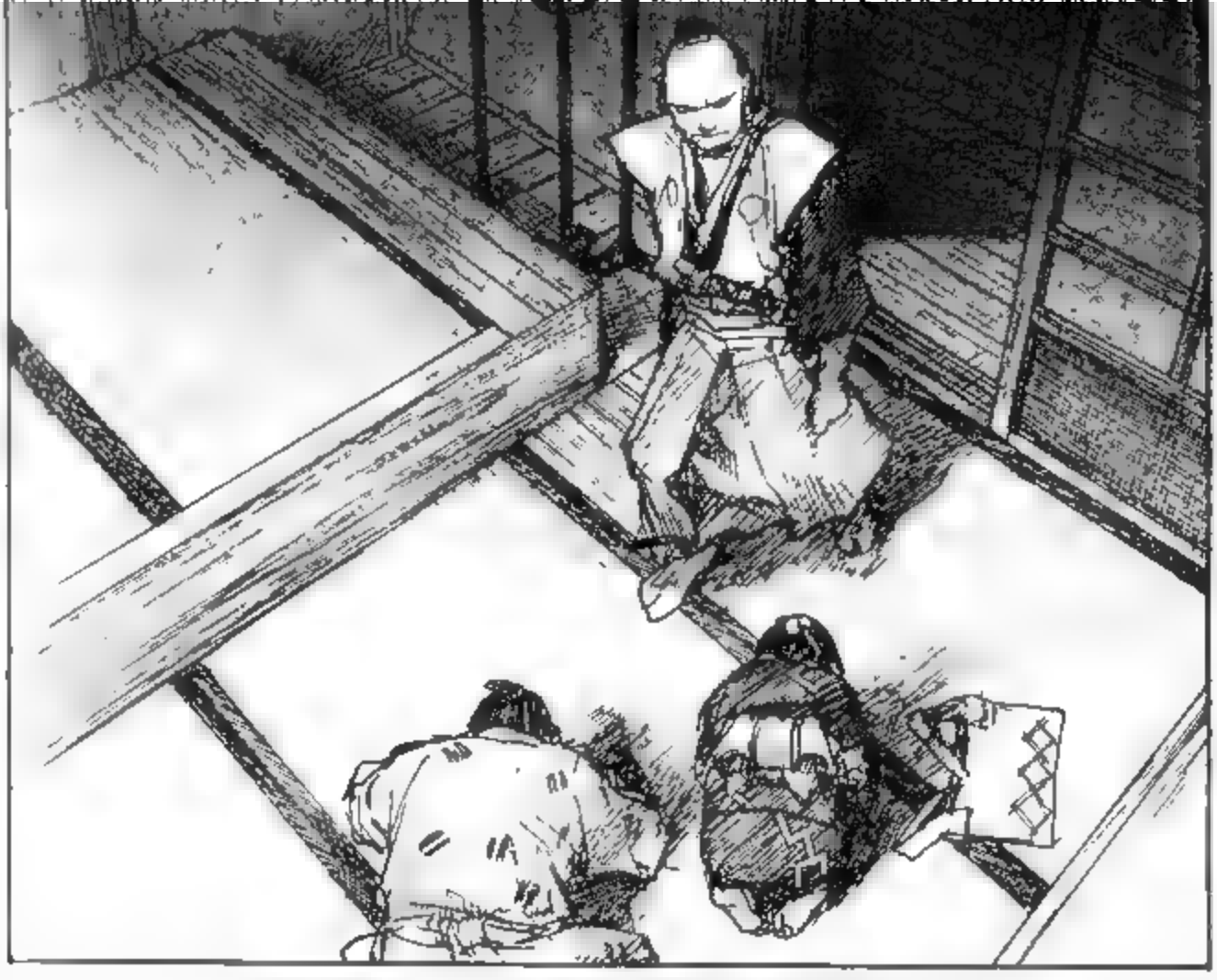
CLOUDBURST
Part 2



MISTER NAKAYA...
LORD, I'M SORRY, MISS!
WE'RE IN A PICKLE NOW, AND THAT'S CERTAIN.
FIRST TIME HE SAID "NO," WE SHOULD'A JUST HEADED BACK.
NOW IT LOOKS BAD, REAL BAD.
DON'T SAY THAT!
WE HAVEN'T BEEN EXPOSED YET.
YEAH, BUT IF WE ARE...
Y'KNOW... A FEW MINUTES AGO...
...WHEN THAT OLD LADY BROUGHT IN THE BARLEY TEA...
...I LOOKED AT IT AND THOUGHT TO MYSELF, "NAKAYA, THIS IS YOUR LAST DRINK IN THIS WORLD"...I SURELY DID.


BUT YOU'RE A COOL ONE, MISS. I GOTTA SAY.
HUH? ME? WELL, I WAS OKAY, ONLY...
...LISTENING TO YOU, I'M GETTING A LITTLE NERVOUS.
Uh... SORRY. ....


THD
THD
THDD
THDD
!



.....
.....

HEH, HEH...

HAHA HAHA!
THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU, NAKAYA!

USUALLY YOU KICK BACK AND DAMN NEAR TALK OUR EARS OFF.
SUDDENLY IT'S ALL RESPECT AND FOREHEAD TO THE FLOOR.

HEH... HEH HEH. WELL, LORD SHIMADA...
TH- THINK ABOUT IT, YOUR HONOR.

THAT KIND OF ATTITUDE IS EASY ENOUGH WITH A VERANDA BE-TWEEN US...
...M'LORD.

BUT SITTING ON THE SAME TATAMI AS YOUR HONOR THE O-BUGYŌ HIMSELF... IT KINDA CHANGES THINGS, M'LORD.

THAT IS INDEED THE WHOLE POINT, NAKAYA.

YOU SEE, WHEN WE WANT TO KNOW A PERSON...
...WE START BY LOOKING INTO THEIR EYES.

AND SO, YOUNG LADY...
..I WANT A GOOD LOOK AT YOURS. LOOK AT ME!
.....
.....
HMM. SEEING YOU UP CLOSE...
...YOU DO LOOK A BIT LIKE NAYAKA'S WIFE.

DON'T YOU...?
EH...?
OH... WELL, UM...
VERY CLEVER...
I BET HE DOESN'T THINK THAT AT ALL.
SO--YOU REMEMBER THE BIG FUSS A WHILE BACK, NAKAYA... EH?
HUH?
THE MURDERS-- THOSE DRUG SALESMEN, JUST DOWN THE ROAD.
UH... OH, YEAH... RIGHT.
WANTED POSTERS UP ALONG ALL THE ROADS...A MAN AND A WOMAN... NEVER DID CATCH THEM.

THAT GOT ME THINKING.
NOW...
...IT HAPPENED ON THE ROAD BETWEEN SHINJUKU AND HERE.
TRUE. IT WAS CLOSER TO SHINJUKU... BUT WHAT FOOLS WOULD GO SOME-PLACE WHERE SO MANY PEOPLE MIGHT SEE THEM?
ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD THEY STROLL UP TO A *SEKISHO* RIGHT AWAY? NO.
BETTER TO LIE UP A WHILE AND LET THINGS COOL OFF A BIT, EH?

SO...AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, MISS... EVEN IF YOU HADN'T COME WITH NAKAYA...
...WE'D STILL HAVE WANTED TO QUESTION YOU CLOSELY.
IF EVERY-THING'S IN ORDER, IT'LL JUST TAKE A FEW MINUTES.
.....
.....
YES, SIR.
THEN LET'S BEGIN WITH YOUR FULL NAME AND ADDRESS...
...MISS.
WELL, Uh, RIGHT OFF THE BAT, O-BUGYŌ!
YOU CALL HER "MISS," BUT SHE'S--
MY NAME IS SAWA, WIFE OF SŌBEI, SON OF SHIMODAYA SENKICHI.
MY HUSBAND IS FROM A BUSINESS FAMILY IN MINO KŌZUCHI. I'M FROM TAKAYAMA, SIR.

DEAR BROTHER-IN-LAW... PLEASE.
I KNOW YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO HELP, BUT...
...YOU REALLY DO HAVE A WAY OF MAKING THINGS WORSE.
.....
.....!
WELL, UH... ...?
HOW ABOUT THAT, NAKAYA?! I'D SAY THE YOUNG LADY KNOWS YOU PRETTY WELL!
EWA HAW HAW!
MINO... SHIMODA-YA, IS IT?
HMM... MY MEMORY ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE...
NOW, SHIMODAYA, M'LORD...
...UP MINO WAY, THEY'RE--
NAKAYA!

I DON'T NEED ANY HELP FROM *YOUR* CHATTERING TONGUE.
?
NOW... WHICH DRAWER WAS IT...?
AH. HERE IT IS.

LET'S SEE...
.....
SHIMODA-YA...
SHIMODA-YA...
HMM.

UH, uh... O-BUGYŌ, M'LORD?
DON'T TELL ME... THAT'S A COPY OF OUR FAMILY RECORDS...?
MM? ACTUALLY, YES... IT IS.
AND...
IF YOU DON'T MIND, NAKAYA.
FROM NOW ON, UNTIL YOU LEAVE THIS ROOM--
--YOU ARE NOT TO SPEAK ANOTHER WORD.
I'M QUESTION-ING THIS WOMAN, NOT YOU.
AND FRANKLY, YOUR "EXPLANA-TIONS" ARE UNLIKELY TO BE ANY HELP AT ALL.
IS THAT UNDER-STOOD?!
FROM NOW ON, ALL ANSWERS...
...ARE TO COME FROM HER ALONE.
Y... Y... YES, SIR!

THAT'S IT-- GAME OVER!!
WE'RE BOTH DEAD!
SO.
MRS. SHIMODAYA SAWA.
ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT, YOUR HUSBAND, SÔBEI, IS THE SECOND-BORN SON OF THE OWNERS OF THE SHIMODAYA INN...
...AND THEY'VE BEEN IN BUSINESS IN MINO FOR THREE GENERA-TIONS.

IS THAT CORRECT...?
YES, SIR.
HOW *IS* THE BUSINESS? DOING WELL?
Y-YES, SIR... QUITE WELL, THANK YOU, SIR.
A *RESTAU-RANT* AND INN, ISN'T IT? YOU HAVE THE NAGARA RIVER RIGHT THERE.
MOSTLY FRESH FISH DISHES, I IMAGINE?
YOUR SISTER AND HER HUSBAND ARE A LUCKY COUPLE.
I'M SURE THEY EAT LIKE ROYALTY WHENEVER THEY VISIT YOU.
PARDON ME, *O-BUGYŌ*.

SHIMODAYA SENKICHI'S ELDEST SON TOOK OVER THE FAMOUS "SHIMODAYA."
MY HUSBAND SŌBEI RUNS AN ORDINARY INN IN MY BIRTHPLACE, TAKAYAMA.
PERHAPS THERE IS A MISTAKE...
...IN YOUR COPY, SIR.
MMM... NO, YOU'RE QUITE RIGHT. MY APOLOGIES.
whew...
NOW, A LITTLE EARLIER...
...NAKAYA SAID YOU WERE TAKING IN THE SIGHTS IN NIKKŌ.

PARDON? OH, YES, SIR!
ALAS, YOUR HONOR...
IT'S THE PERFECT SEASON.
THE FAMOUS GREENERY IN GANMAN GORGE MUST BE EXQUISITE RIGHT NOW.
...THE PATH TO THE GORGE WAS CLOSED BY A LANDSLIDE. IT'S BEEN IMPASSABLE FOR QUITE SOME TIME NOW.
SO INSTEAD I WENT ON AND SAW CHŪZENJI TEMPLE BEFORE STARTING BACK.
AH, NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT... I DID HEAR SOMETHING ABOUT THAT SLIDE.
I'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT THAT.
MAKES ME GLAD I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY WHEN I HAD IT.
YOU ARE ONE TRICKY SON OF A BITCH, SHIMADA O-BUGYŌ....

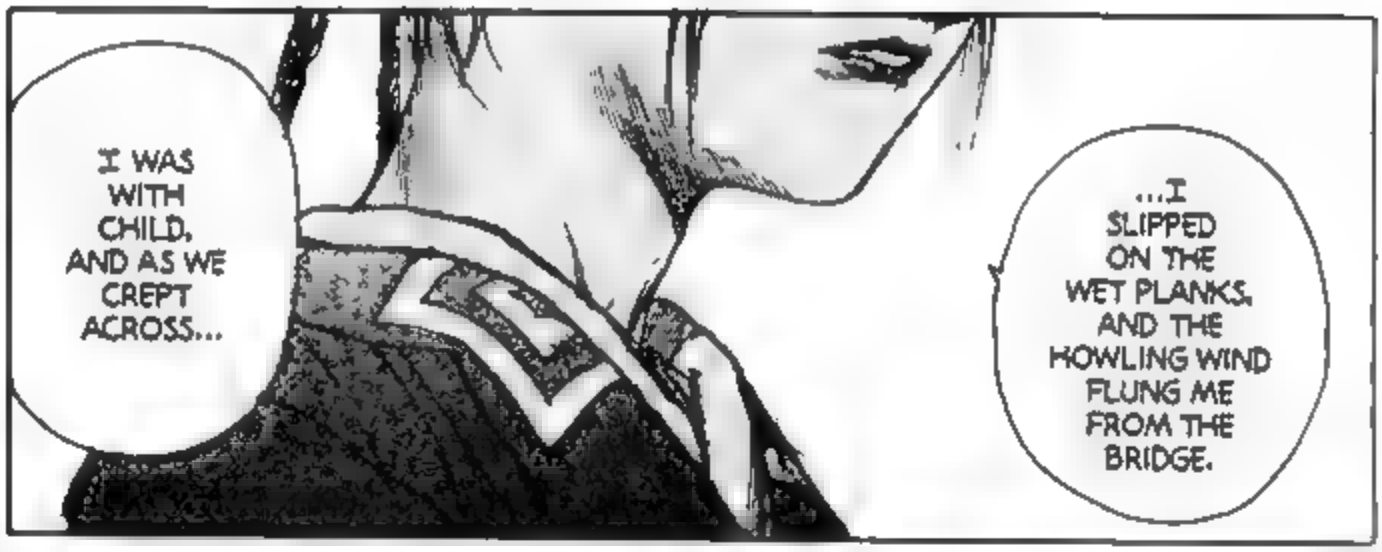
...I GATHER YOU WERE VISITING YOUR SISTER AND BROTHER-IN-LAW BY YOURSELF?
BY THE WAY, SEEING JUST THE TWO OF YOU HERE...
HMM? WELL... YES, SIR.
NO, SIR...WE COULDN'T JUST CLOSE THE INN, SIR.
NO, NO... OF COURSE NOT. QUITE REASON-ABLE.
WHAT ABOUT YOUR HUS-BAND?
HE DIDN'T COME WITH YOU?
STILL... IT MUST HAVE BEEN LONELY, WALK-ING AROUND NIKKŌ ALL BY YOUR-SELF.

YES, SIR... A LITTLE.
NOW... YOU AND YOUR SISTER SATO... YOUR PARENTS...
THEY HAD A DRIED FOODS SHOP IN TAKAYAMA... SHUT IT DOWN AFTER THEIR DAUGHTERS WERE MARRIED...
IT SAYS HERE THEY MOVED INTO ONE ROOM OF YOUR INN.
..AND WENT TO STAY WITH THE DAUGHTER AND HER HUSBAND IN TAKAYAMA... THAT'S YOU, YES?
COULDN'T THEY HAVE LOOKED AFTER THE INN FOR YOU? OR FOR THAT MATTER, WHY DIDN'T YOUR PARENTS COME WITH YOU...?
NOT VERY CONSIDER-ATE OF YOU, SAWA.
SO MANY OPTIONS TO AVOID A LONELY ROAD...

.....
.....
MY LORD O-BUGYŌ.
DAY AFTER DAY...
...THE RESPONS-IBILITIES OF DEALING WITH SO MANY PEOPLE... IT MUST BE *TIRING* FOR YOU, SIR.
A STRESSFUL AND THANKLESS JOB.

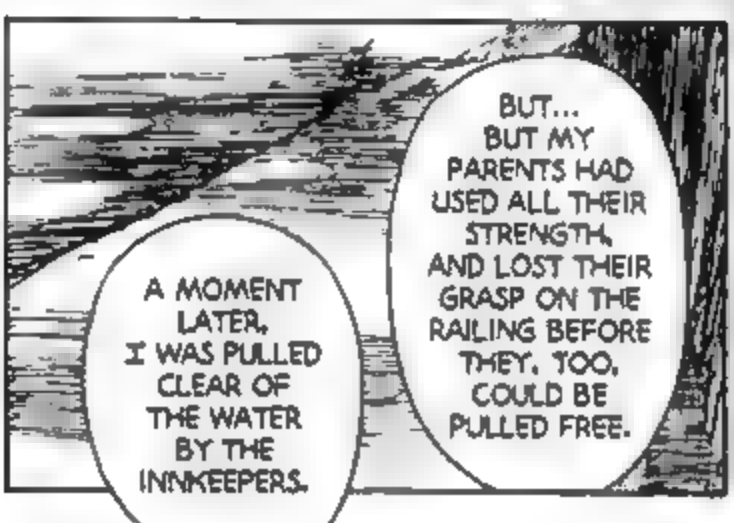
AND WE TRAVELERS, TOO, SIR-- ALL WE WISH IS SAFE PASSAGE ON OUR JOURNEYS.
SO FEW, SO VERY FEW OF US WOULD HAVE ANY REASON TO LIE TO YOU.
AND YET... YOUR QUES- TION...
JUST NOW...
...TO ASK SUCH A THING, WHEN YOU CLEARLY MUST ALREADY KNOW THE WHOLE SAD STORY...
...IS THAT N- NOT... .....
IS THAT NOT A BIT TOO CRUEL, SIR?
HOW CAN I EVER FORGET?
.....
.....

THE FIRST SUMMER AFTER MY MARRIAGE, I DID JUST AS YOU'VE SUGGESTED.
I LEFT THE INN TO MY HUSBAND, AND TOOK MY PARENTS TO SEE NIKKŌ.
THE HIKE FROM CHUZENJI TO THE HOT SPRINGS WAS FINE.
BUT ON THE WAY BACK, WE STAYED THE NIGHT AT A RIVERBANK INN NEAR GANMAN GORGE.
THAT... THAT WAS OUR MOMENT OF DESTINY.
THERE WAS A CLOUDBURST, A DOWNPOUR, TURNING THE ŌTANI RIVER INTO A RAGING TORRENT. WE WERE STUCK, TRAPPED IN THE MOUNTAINS FOR TWO WHOLE DAYS. AND ON THE THIRD DAY, STILL IT FELL...
...UNTIL THE LITTLE INN ITSELF WAS IN DANGER OF BEING SWEPT AWAY ON THE FLOOD. WE HAD TO CHANCE IT. THAT NIGHT, WE AND THE INNKEEPERS TOOK OUR LIVES INTO OUR HANDS...
...AND CROSSED THE LONG, NARROW, AND DANGEROUS BRIDGE TO THE TŌSHŌGŪ SHRINE, BLINDED BY THE DARK AND THE DRIVING RAIN.


I WAS WITH CHILD, AND AS WE CREPT ACROSS...
...I SLIPPED ON THE WET PLANKS, AND THE HOWLING WIND FLUNG ME FROM THE BRIDGE.

I CLUNG DESPERATELY TO THE RAILING, BUT MY LEGS WERE CAUGHT BY THE RAGING CURRENT, AND THE WET PLANKS GAVE THOSE WITH ME NO FOOTING TO LIFT ME OUT. I REMEMBER THINK-ING..."I'M GOING TO DIE."
AND THEN, MY FATHER, SEEING ME THERE, AND MY MOTHER AFTER HIM... I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY WERE THINKING, BUT THEY THREW THEMSELVES INTO THE RIVER, TOO.

BOTH OF THEM CLUNG TO THE RAILING, AND GRASPING MY SODDEN KIMONO...
BOTH OF THEM...
...THEY DRAGGED ME UP FROM THE RIVER WITH ALL THEIR STRENGTH.


A MOMENT LATER, I WAS PULLED CLEAR OF THE WATER BY THE INNKEEPERS.
BUT... BUT MY PARENTS HAD USED ALL THEIR STRENGTH, AND LOST THEIR GRASP ON THE RAILING BEFORE THEY, TOO, COULD BE PULLED FREE.

FIVE DAYS LATER... ON A SANDBANK FAR DOWN-STREAM...
...THEIR BODIES WERE FOUND, STILL CLINGING TOGETHER.

THIS... THIS TRIP TO NIKKŌ...
IT WASN'T FOR *SIGHT-SEEING*, SIR.

I WANTED TO WALK, ONE MORE TIME... WHERE I'D WALKED WITH MY PARENTS.
MY OWN... MY WAY OF SOOTHING... THEIR SPIRITS...
..... I... .....

I...
.....
.....
EVEN AFTER BEARING CHIL-DREN...
...I WEAR MY HAIR IN THIS YOUTHFUL FASHION...
BECAUSE IT'S WH-WHAT...
MOTHER AND FATHER KNEW BEST...
AT LEAST, FOR THIS SHORT WHILE, IN THE MOUN-TAINS...
.....
.....
I, I'M SORRY... I DIDN'T MEAN TO CRY. I...
.....

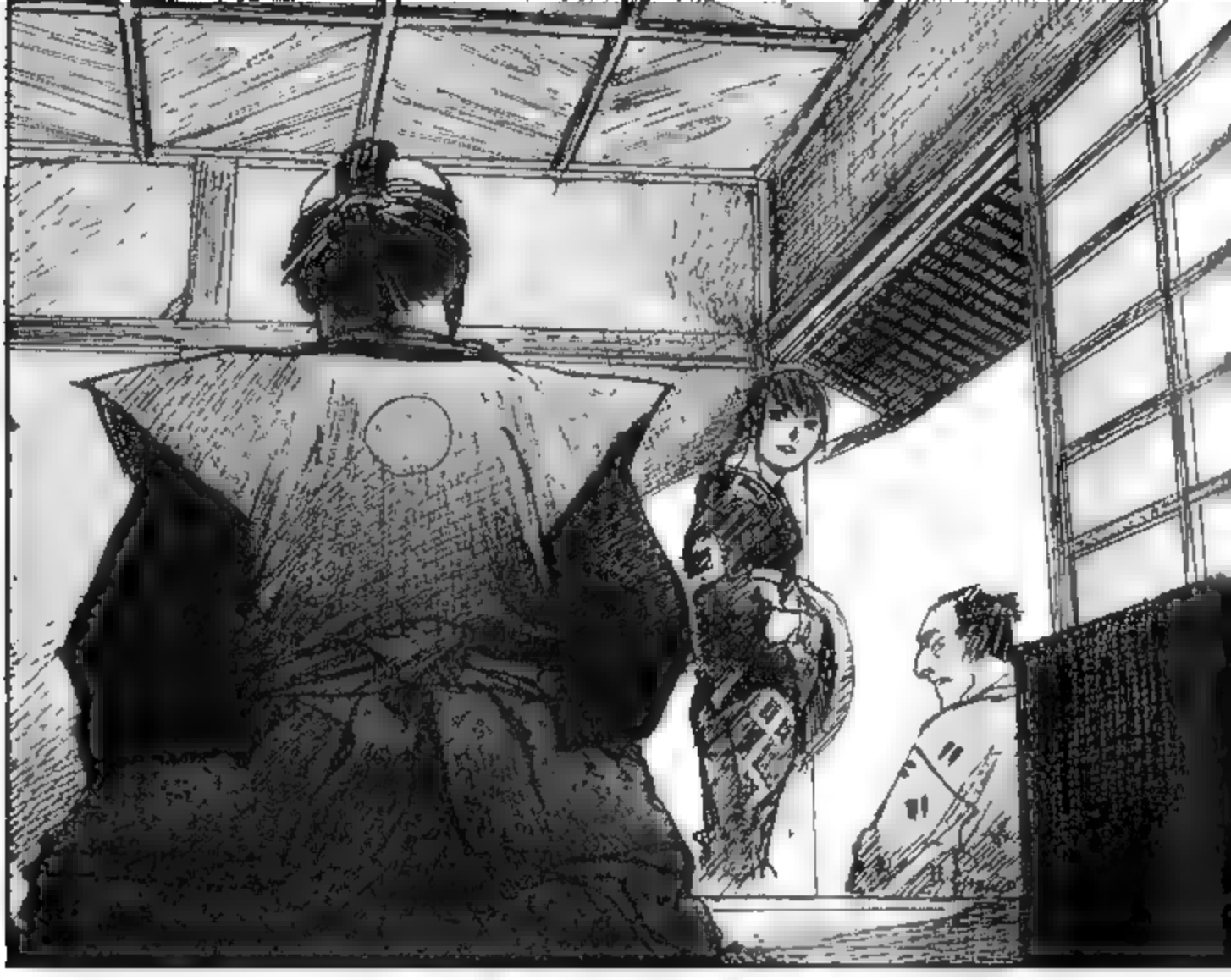
.....
.....
I UNDER-STAND.
BUT-- YOU RESEMBLE THE DRAWING ON THE WANTED POSTER.
I HAD TO BE RUTHLESS.
THIS STORY YOU'VE TOLD...
IT'S STILL POSSIBLE YOU COULD SIMPLY HAVE MEM-ORIZED IT, BUT...
.....
WELL... ENOUGH.

LET THOSE TEARS...
...BE YOUR TSŪKŌ TEGATA.

AH...? YOU MEAN, O-BUGYŌ, SIR...
YES.
WE... WE CAN... GO...?
MY APOLOGIES FOR THIS DELAY.

whew.

SAWA--
WAIT.
YOU SAID SOMETHING RATHER *INTEREST-ING.*
JUST NOW.



.....
...?
WHAT MIGHT THAT BE, S-SIR?

MM...
.....
NOTHING MUCH. DON'T BE SO NERVOUS.

HOW'S YOUR CHILD? HEALTHY?
YOU MENTIONED YOU WERE EXPECTING.
WHEN YOU WERE IN NIKKŌ BACK THEN, I MEAN.
AH... Y-YES.
THANK YOU FOR ASKING. QUITE WELL... BOTH OF THEM.
AH... TWINS, EH? GLAD TO HEAR IT. WHICH REMINDS ME...
...I FORGOT ONE MORE THING.

YOUR AGE.
HOW OLD ARE YOU, SAWA?
COUNTING THIS YEAR?
UM... ACTUALLY... TEN AND SEVEN.
SEVENTEEN, IS IT...? HMM. ACCORDING TO OUR REPORT...
...THE ŌDANI RIVER FLOODED IN THE FIRST YEAR OF KANSEI.
SO, COUNTING BACK...
...YOUR AGE WHEN YOU DELIVERED TWINS WAS...
...JUST FOURTEEN.
YES...?

YES, SIR. THAT'S RIGHT.
HM HM HMM...
FOUR-TEEN, EH?
"TOO YOUNG" ...?
IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, SHIMADA?
YET... JUST LISTENING HERE... EVERYTHING SHE'S SAID IS TRUE.
EVERY-THING EXCEPT HER BEING SAWA.
SAWA DID HAVE TWINS AT FOUR-TEEN!
IT'S GOTTA BE THERE IN THOSE DAMNED RECORDS.
GOTCHA ON THIS ONE, MISTER CLEVER BUGYŌ! EH?!

IT MUST HAVE BEEN A HARD DELIVERY.
TWINS, IN SUCH A YOUNG BODY...AND *ESPECIALLY* YOURS.
YOU *STILL* LOOK LIKE A YOUNG GIRL.
NOT JUST YOUR HAIR, BUT THAT SLENDER FRAME...
WELL... YES, SIR.
IT *WAS* HARD.
WHEN MY CHILDREN GROW UP, YOU CAN JUST BET I'LL LET THEM KNOW ABOUT IT, TOO!
THEY BETTER BE *GRATE-FUL* TO THEIR MOM!
HEH HEH... VERY AMUSING.

AND SO... YOU CAN OF COURSE *PROVE* THAT "HARD DELIVERY"...?
TO THE *EYE*?

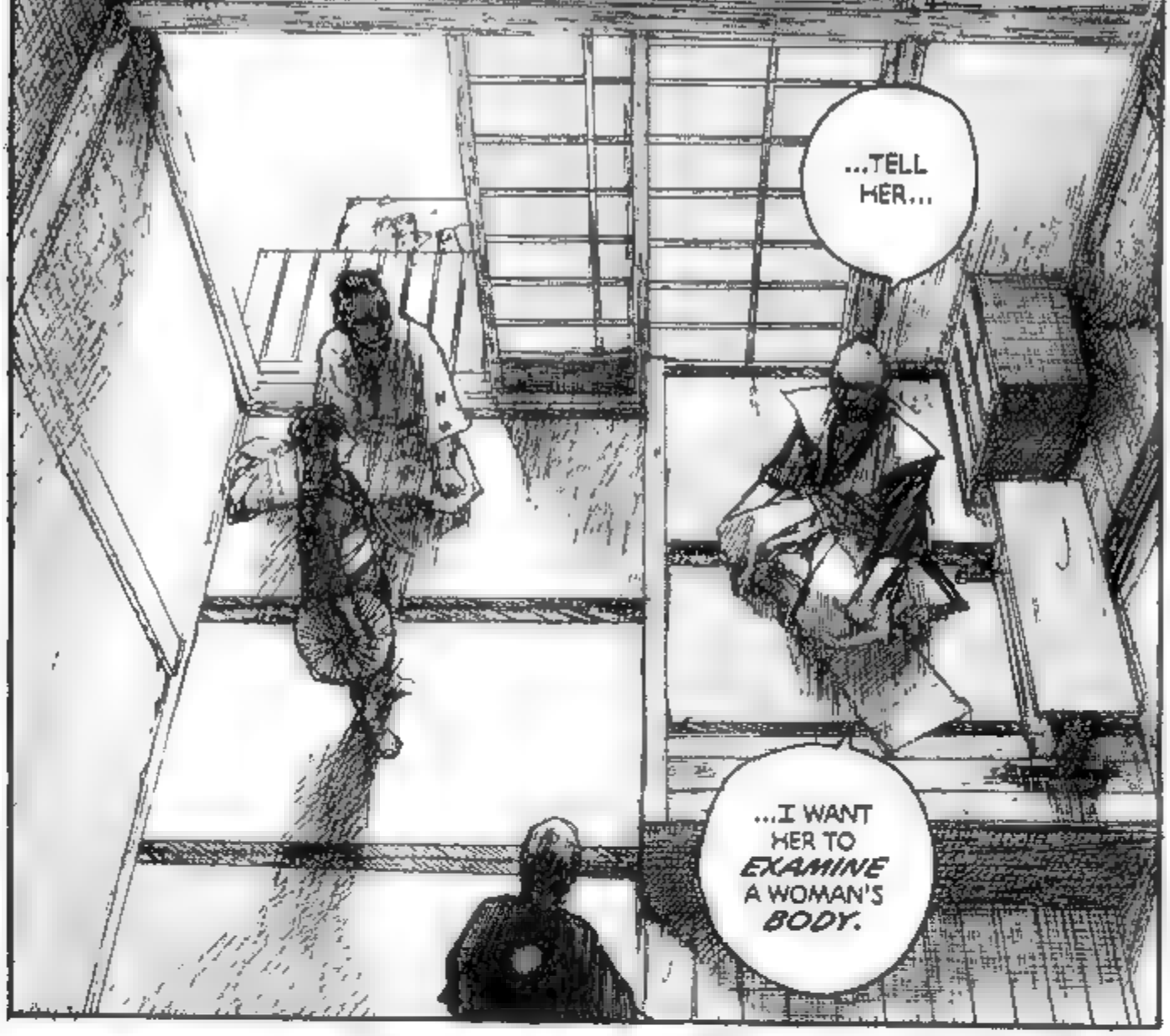
:ulp!:

.....
.....!

HMM? WHAT'S *WRONG*?
SURELY YOU MUST KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

ODD... IF YOU'RE THE REAL SAWA...
...YOU SHOULD HAVE NO DIFFICULTY PROVIDING SUCH PROOF.
nng...

I TAKE IT BACK... YOU *ARE* CLEVER!
DAMN... I NEVER *DREAMED* HE'D ASK...
URAGAMI!
URA-GAMI...?!
UM... SIR? I...
HERE, SIR.
GET OLD FUJI AND HAVE HER WAIT NEXT DOOR.
IF SHE ASKS...

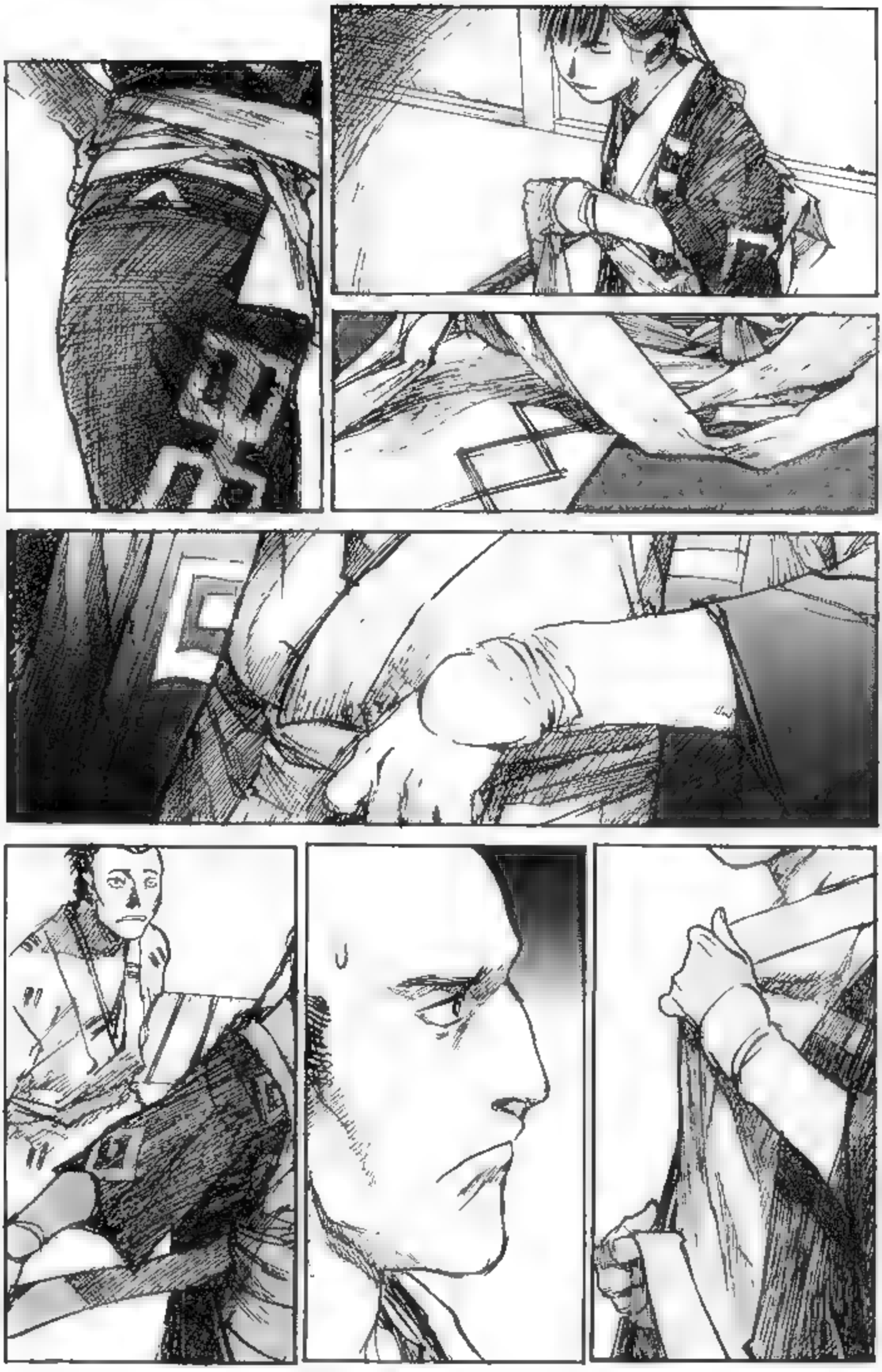

...TELL HER...
...I WANT HER TO *EXAMINE* A WOMAN'S *BODY.*

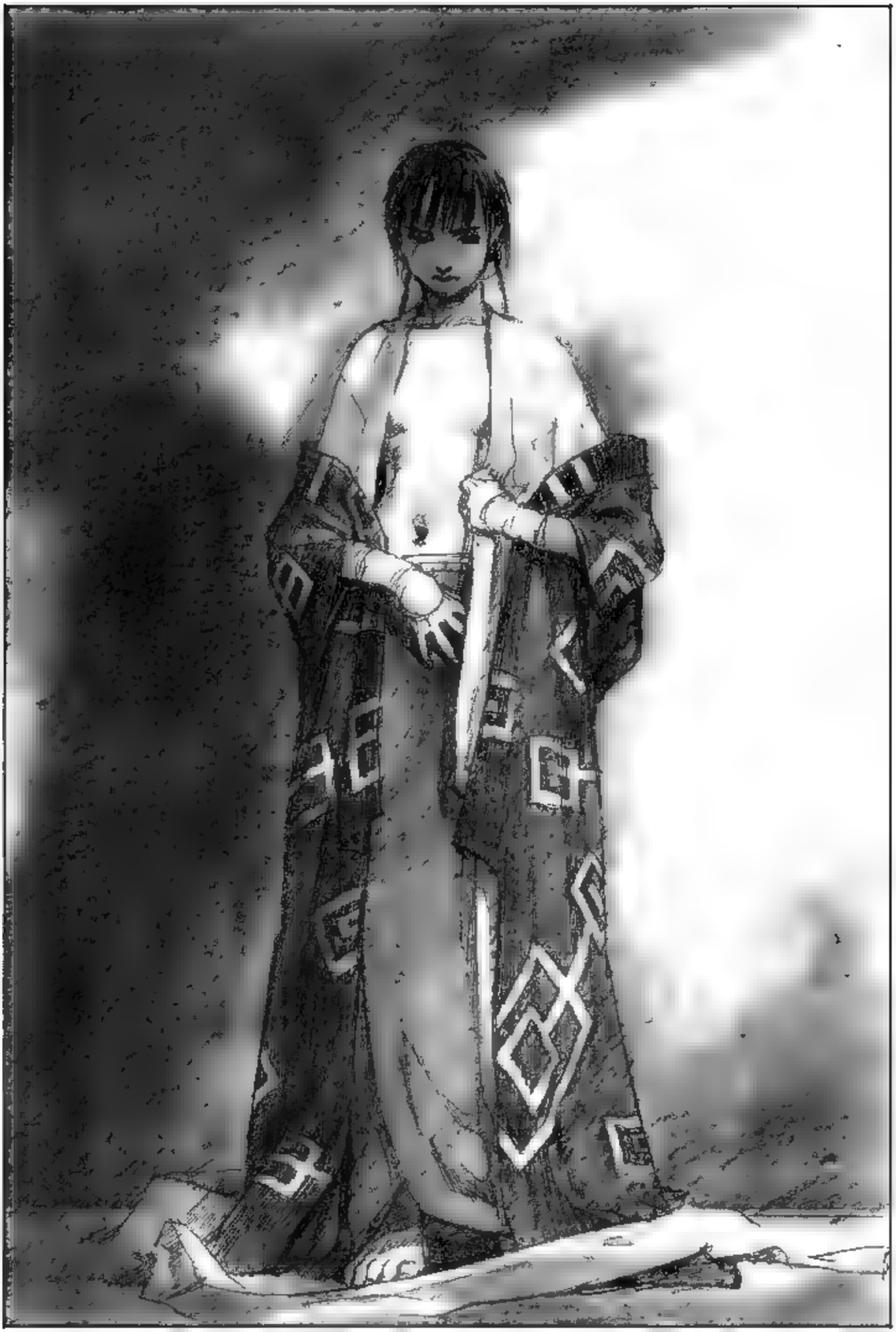
B-BUT, *SIR!*
JUST HOLD *ON* THERE! SAWA IS A *MARRIED WOMAN!* YOU CAN'T JUST--

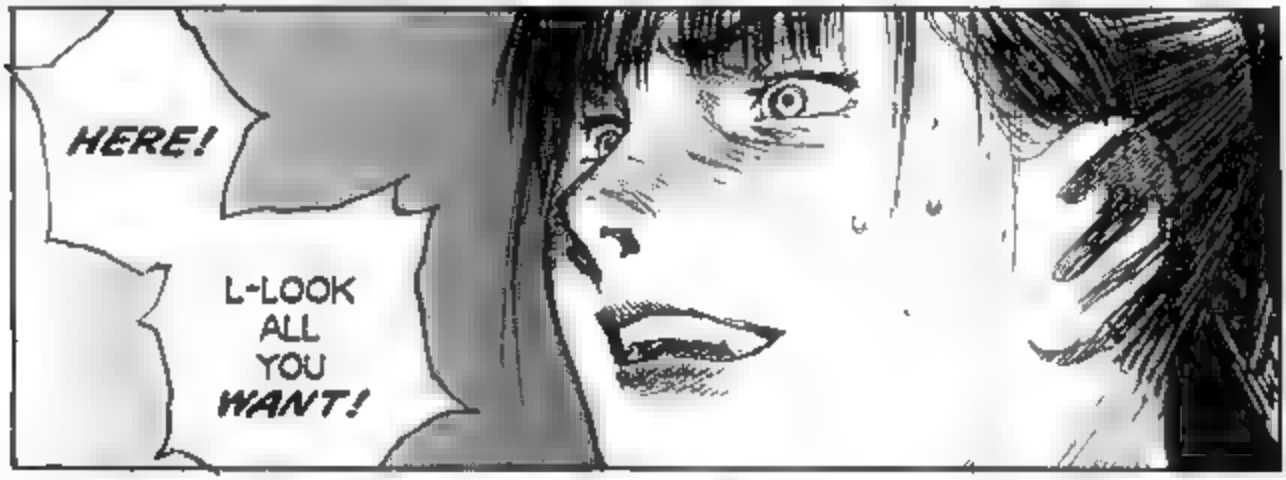
O-BUGYŌ-SAMA!!

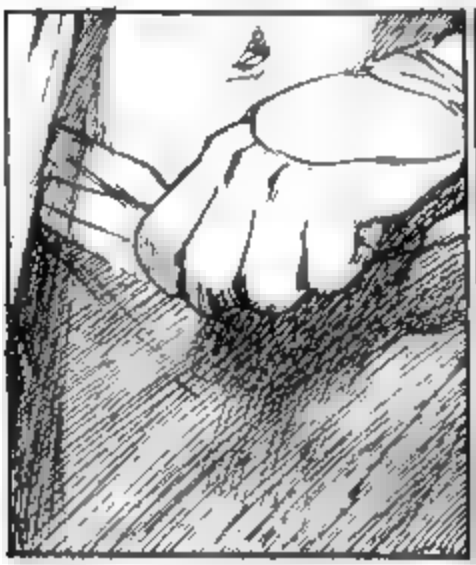
.....
.....
.....
I...
I AM...
.SHIMODAYA SAWA OF TAKAYAMA!
WIFE OF SHIMODAYA SŌBEI!
AND SO, THESE MYSTERIOUS WORDS YOU SPEAK?
I UNDER-STAND THEM PERFECT-LY.
IF YOU DISTRUST ME SO MUCH, YOU DON'T NEED TO CALL THE OLD WOMAN.

I'LL REVEAL ALL BEFORE OUR HONORABLE O-BUGYŌ. FOR HIS VIEWING PLEASURE!
ABSOLUTE PROOF-- ALL THAT THE GOOD SIR DESIRES!
THIS IS WHAT YOU MEAN...






HERE!
L-LOOK ALL YOU WANT!



!!

.....
.....
...
.....
.....
.....
O-
BUGYŌ,
SIR...
YOU
HAVE
WRITTEN
DOWN
THERE...
...I
AM
SURE...

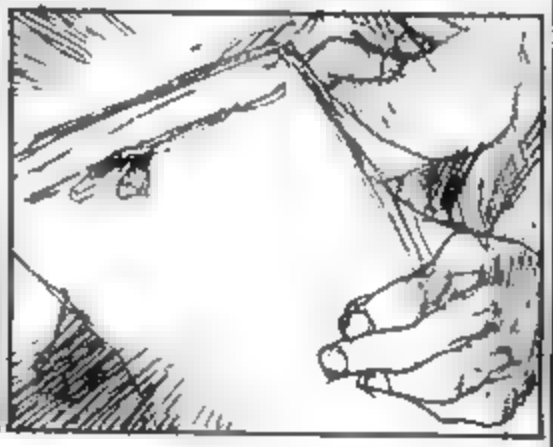
...THAT THE EFFECTS OF THOSE TERRIBLE EVENTS IN GANMAN GORGE...
...TOUCHED EVEN MY UNBORN BABIES.
THE SHOCK THREW ME INTO LABOR--AND MY YOUNG BODY WAS NOT MADE TO DELIVER TWO CHILDREN.
EVEN MORE SO WHEN THEY WERE A BREECH BIRTH.
THE TWO SONS I HAVE TODAY LIVE ONLY BECAUSE...
...ON THE JUDGMENT OF THE MIDWIFE AND MY HUSBAND...
...THEY CUT DEEP INTO ME...
...AND PLUCKED THOSE CHILDREN FROM MY WOMB.

Uh...
SIR...?
FUJI-
SAN...?
NO.
NO.
ENOUGH.
QUITE
ENOUGH.

REALLY, O-BUGYŌ, SIR?!
ARE YOU QUITE SURE THERE IS NOTHING MORE YOU WISH TO SEE?!

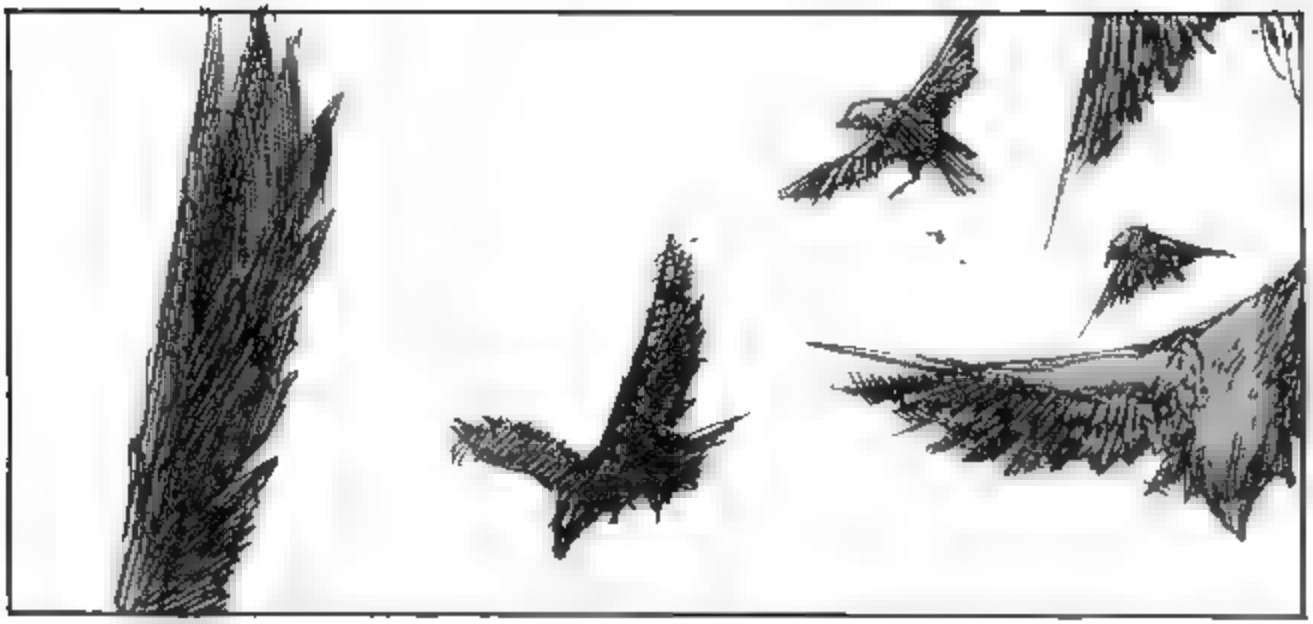
.....
.....
.....
.....

.....
.....



FU

THERE ARE NO FURTHER QUES-TIONS!
THE CASE IS CLOSED!!
SAWA-SAN!
Y...YES, SIR?!
YOU'RE QUITE A WOMAN.
I WISH YOU GOOD LUCK ON YOUR TRAVELS.



EH HEH HEH
SON OF A BITCH TOOK TEN YEARS OFF MY LIFE.
AAH... HA! HA HA HA!
NOW I'M SHAKING.

CAN'T HARDLY LOOK YOU IN THE FACE, MISS.
?? PARDON...?
AFTER EVERY-THING I TOLD YOU... HEH.
I COULDN'T LIFT A FINGER TO HELP YOU.
BUT IF I HADN'T BEEN WITH YOU, MISTER NAKAYA...
..I'D NEVER HAVE MADE IT AS FAR AS THE INTERROGA-TION.
YEAH, WELL... TRUE ENOUGH.

YOU KNOW... AT THE END, THERE.
EH?
AND THAT WAS REALLY SOMETHING, TOO!
BUT OLD SHIMADA REALLY MET HIS MATCH IN YOU, GIRL! YOU'VE GOT NERVES OF STEEL, YOU DO.
OKAY, IT BLEW ME AWAY THAT YOU REALLY HAD A SCAR...
BUT LIKE... IN FRONT OF THREE, UH... GUYS, YOU JUST...RIGHT?
OH.
YES... THAT.
WELL, ACTUALLY... I HAD TO SHOW HIM THEN AND THERE.
IF THEY'D CALLED IN THAT OLD LADY AND HAD HER DO A STRIP-SEARCH ON ME...
I NEVER COULD HAVE FOOLED HER.
SHE'D HAVE NOTICED RIGHT AWAY THAT IT ISN'T A CAESAREAN SCAR.
AND THE BIT OF MAKEUP

WHAT?
NO WAY!
IT
ISN'T?
NO.
REMEMBER
WAY BACK
WHEN I FIRST
ARRIVED AT
YOUR
INN...?

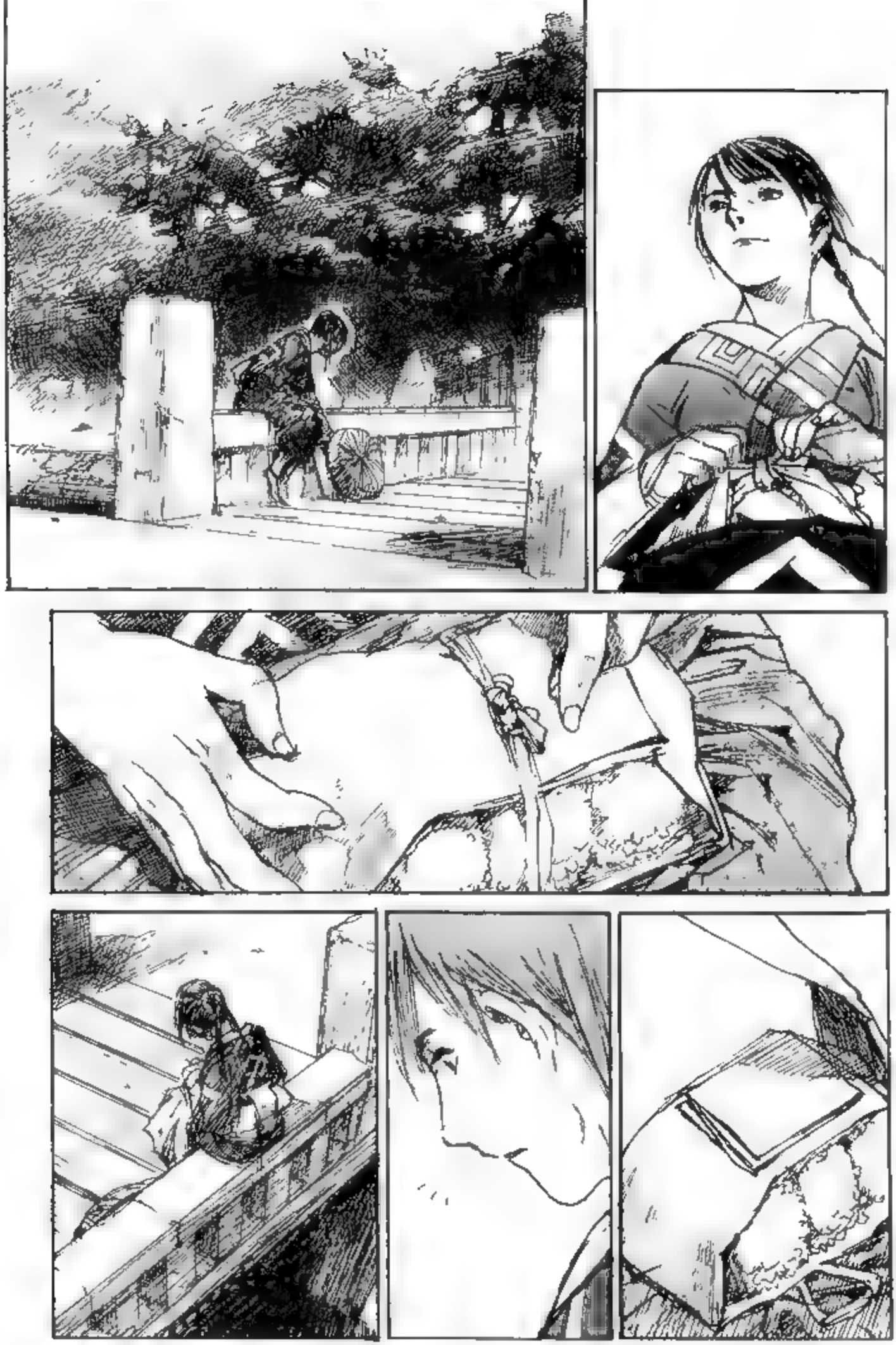
HURTS?
I'M ALMOST DONE... BEAR IT.
...! nnk!
NOW... PRESS DOWN UNTIL THE BLEEDING STOPS.
I DIDN'T CUT VERY DEEP.
A YEAR FROM NOW IT'LL HARDLY BE VISIBLE.

LATER...
...I'LL WRITE DOWN EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MY LITTLE SISTER AND HER FAMILY, AND BRING IT TO YOUR ROOM.
THEN WE BEGIN-- TO *MEM-ORIZE* IT.
Y-YES MA'AM
BUT...
THE SCAR?
YES.
IT MAY NOT BE NECESSARY.
AND IT WON'T STAND A CLOSE INVESTIGA-TION.
BUT IF CARVING INTO YOUR *FLESH*...
...IMPROVES YOUR *ODDS* EVEN A LITTLE...
...THEN I'M SURE IT'S WORTH THE PAIN, YES?
Y-YES.... *UM*, I... SATO-*SAN*?

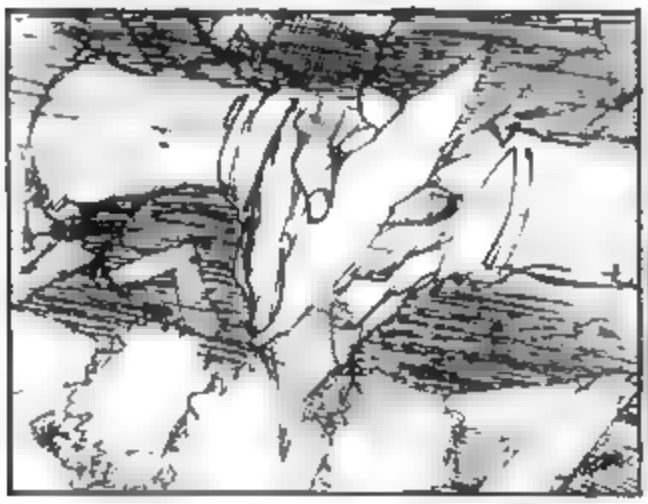
I'M SORRY. IT SEEMS I'M ALWAYS JUST TAKING. OTHER PEOPLE'S WISDOM, MONEY, SKILLS... EVERY-THING.
IF I SURVIVE, I PROMISE I'LL COME BACK AND MAKE IT UP TO Y--
DON'T TALK LIKE A FOOL!
THERE'S A PRICE ON YOUR HEAD!
WHAT IDIOT GOES BACK INTO THE LION'S JAWS?
THIS LITTLE IDEA OF MINE? CONSIDER IT BOUGHT AND PAID FOR...
...WITH TWENTY-ONE RYŌ.
IF YOU EVER ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL... THEN, AFTER THAT...
...JUST THINK ABOUT HOW TO BE HAPPY.

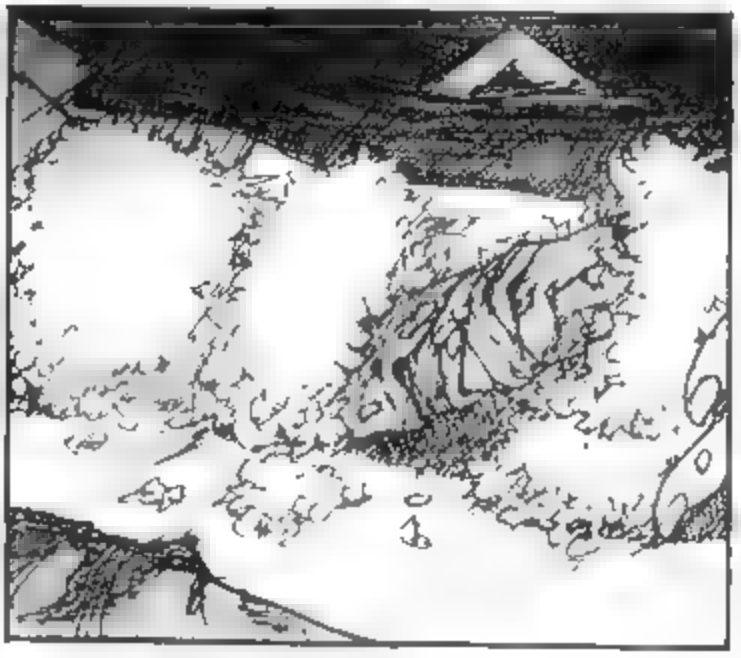
AND IF WHAT YOU DO... SHOWS *US* WE DID THE RIGHT THING...
...THAT'S ALL WE'LL EVER NEED.

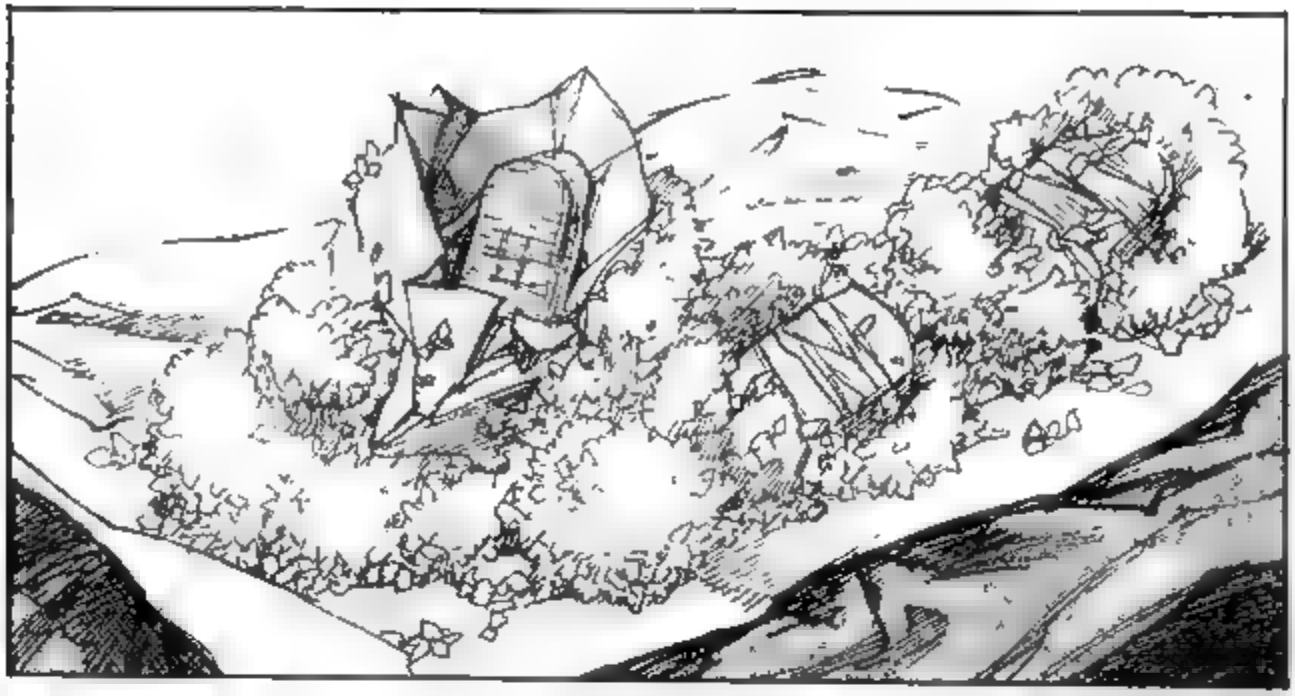
WELL, HERE'S AS FAR AS I GO... NOW, YOU BE CAREFUL!
I WILL... YOU TAKE CARE, TOO, MISTER NAKAYA.

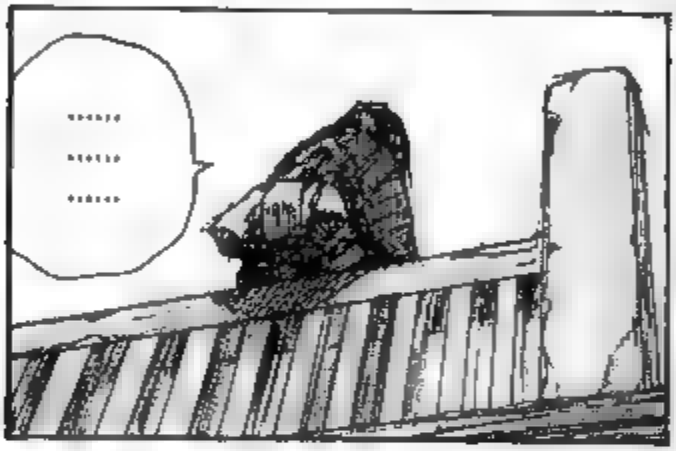


It was very generous of you, but honestly,
I can't imagine what we'd do with twenty-one yen
I hope you don't mind, but I'd like you to
take half of it back.
Best
Nakaya Sato
P.S. Don't worry—my husband
knows I'm doing this

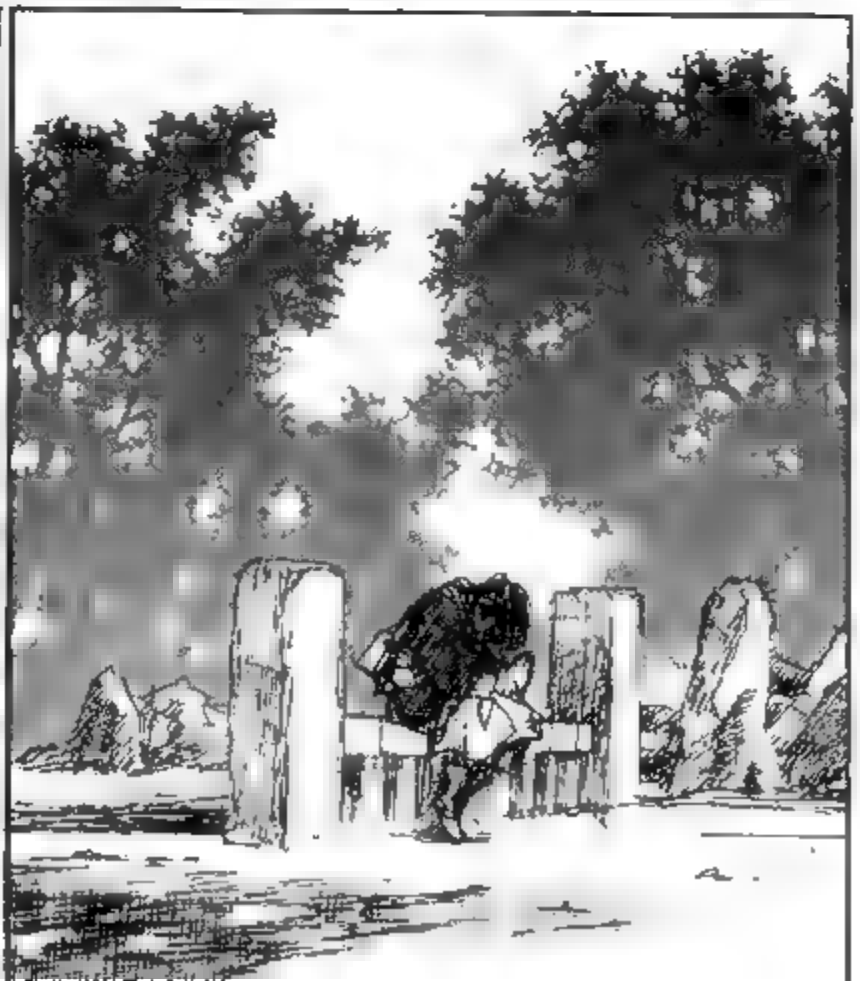




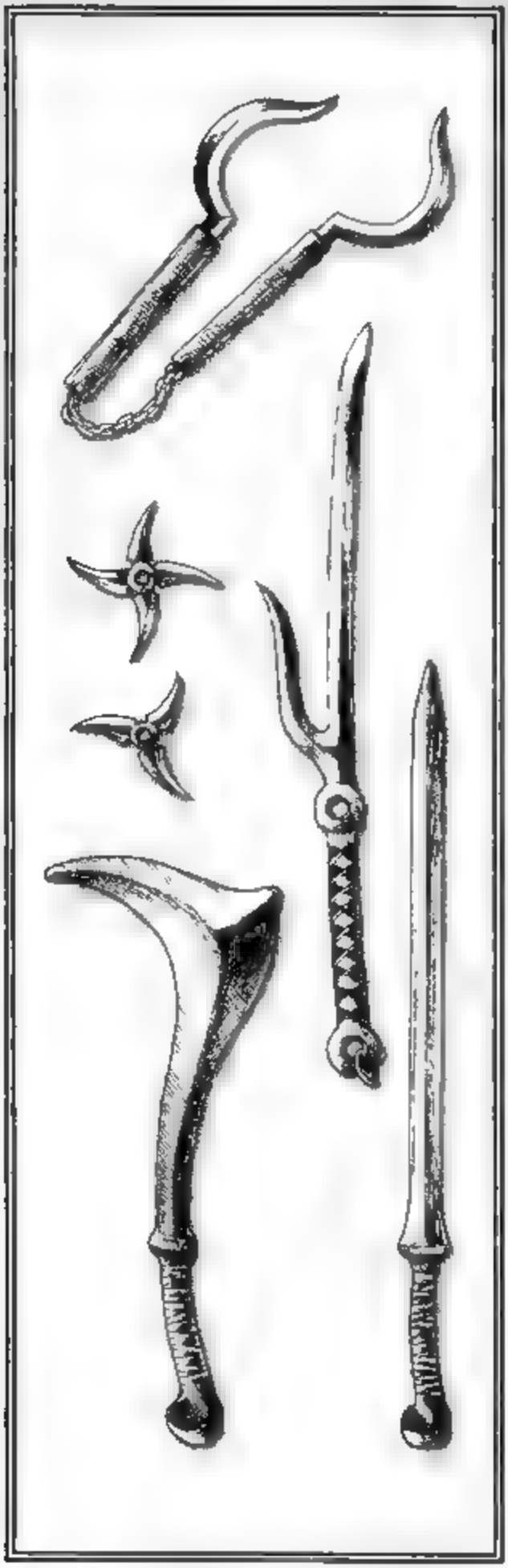




THE GATHERING: **END**



GLOSSARY



banshi: samurai manning a *sekisho* (checkpoint)

bugyō: a high-ranked samurai in charge of keeping the peace, with the help of the men under his command and volunteer "posse" members

Koshū Byway: one of the main roads out of Edo to the western provinces

ryō: a gold piece (note: the money Rin gives Nakaya and Sato in this story would probably amount to several years' worth of normal income for the innkeepers)

sekisho: checkpoint regulating travel from Edo to other *han* (feudal domains). All travelers had to submit papers at official checkpoints along the main highways into and out of Edo.

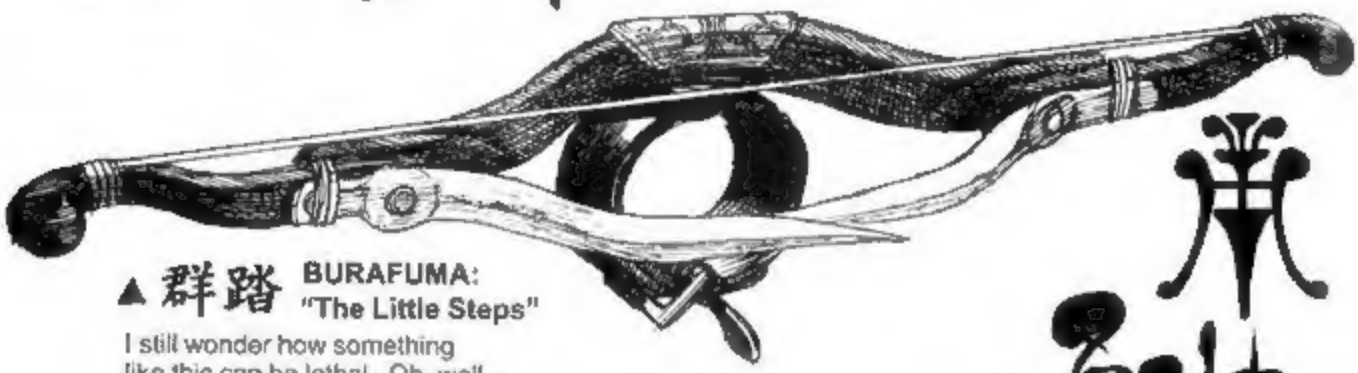
tatami: a thick, rice straw mat used as flooring in traditional Japanese households, still commonly found in at least one room of a residence even today

tegata (tsūkō tegata): official travel pass for transiting *sekisho*

HEY, KIDS!
IT'S YET ANOTHER...

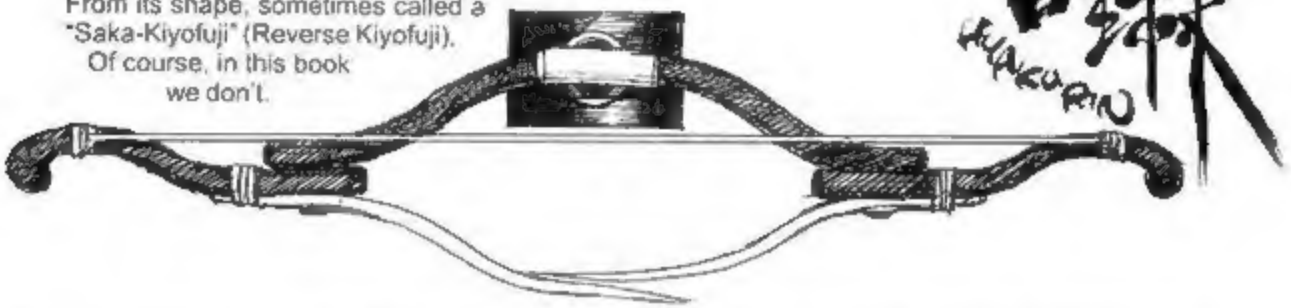
SPECIAL "PAD OUT THE END OF THE BOOK" SPECIAL!

SAMURA'S WEAPON SHOP OPEN 24 HOURS

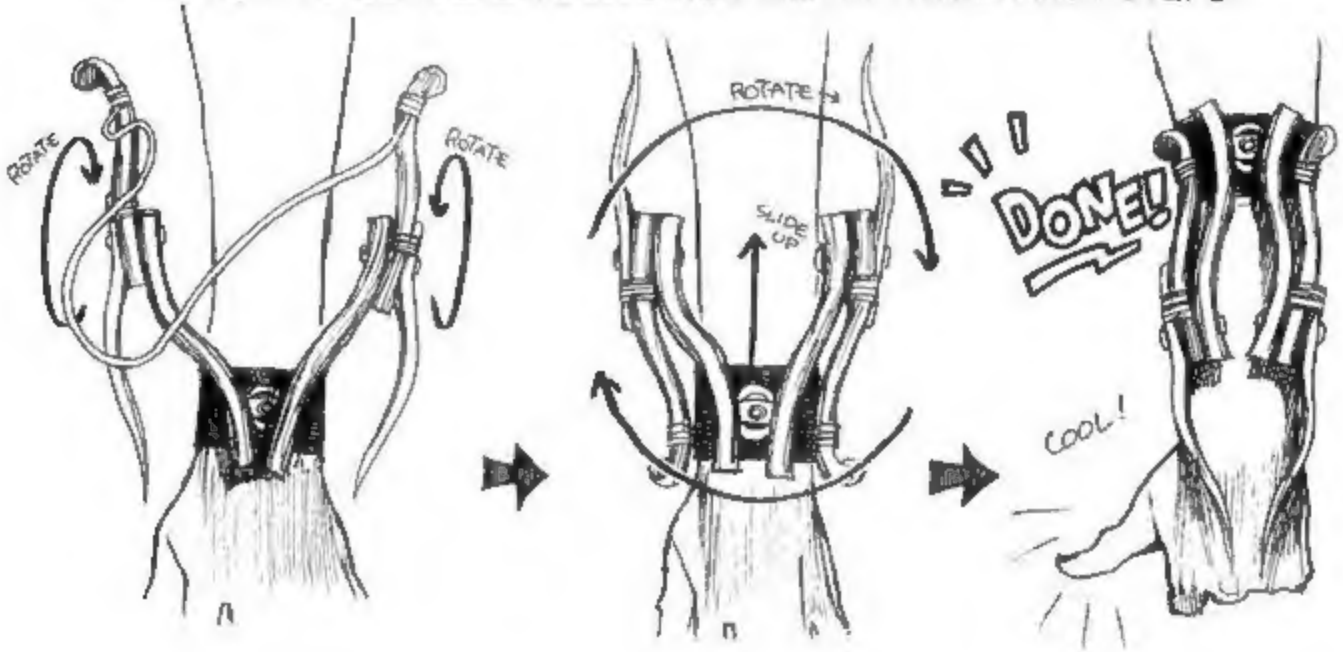


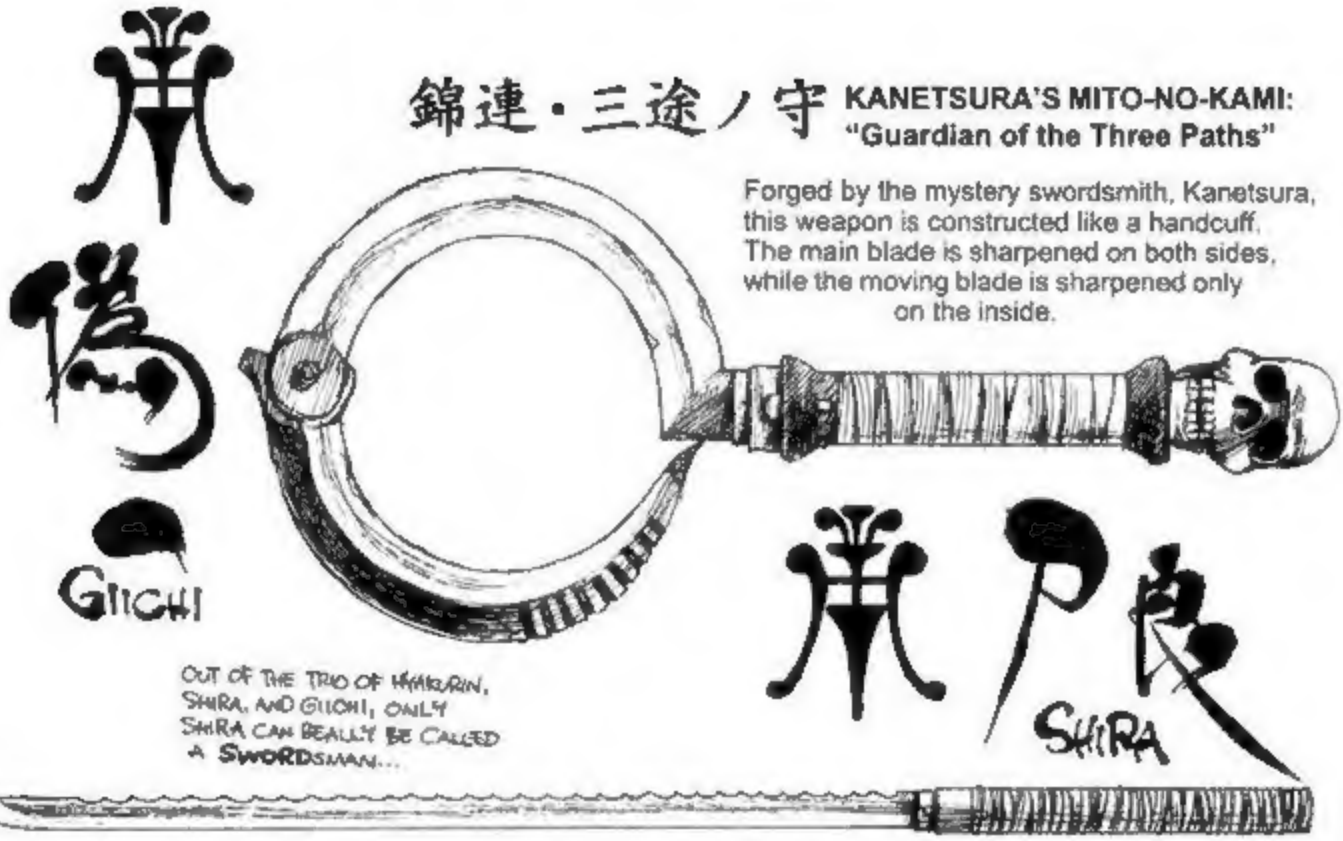
▲群踏 **BURAFUMA: "The Little Steps"**

I still wonder how something like this can be lethal. Oh, well... From its shape, sometimes called a "Saka-Kiyofuji" (Reverse Kiyofuji). Of course, in this book we don't.



HOW TO CONCEAL YOUR BURAFUMA IN THREE EASY STEPS





錦連・三途ノ守 KANETSURA'S MITO-NO-KAMI: "Guardian of the Three Paths"

Forged by the mystery swordsmith, Kanetsura, this weapon is constructed like a handcuff. The main blade is sharpened on both sides, while the moving blade is sharpened only on the inside.

OUT OF THE TRIO OF HYAKURIN, SHIRA, AND GIICHI, ONLY SHIRA CAN REALLY BE CALLED A SWORDSMAN...

◀燕誅丸

ENCHŪ-MARU: "Swallows of Death"

To be perfectly honest, I wonder why he doesn't just use a normal sword. You can't kill anyone with these things unless you precisely strike a lethal point.

鬼太鼓桴▶

ONDEKO-BACHI: "Devil's Drumstick"

Uruma swings this thing around like some college baseball star.

By the way, Hanada was supposed to look like John Lennon, but when I was finished he was just another *otaku* dude. Where did I go wrong...?

▲ホトソギ(女陰削ぎ)

HOTOSOGI:

The *kanji* for writing the name of this weapon have a very unpleasant second meaning. The sawlike edge of the blade has only one purpose—to inflict maximum pain. It's a heretical sword that seems to crystallize Shira's own warped personality.

飛火丸 HIGA

▼神刀 KAMUJIN: "Godblade"

Out of all the countries Japan was trading with at the time, who would have exported this vaguely Southeast Asian sword? Putting that aside for now, this is another piece that, depending on the skill of the wielder, is weighty enough to shatter an opponent's blade.

OF COURSE, IT DOESN'T CUT VERY WELL.

万次 MANJI

▲助広・雨椿 SUKEHIRO AMATSUBAKI: "Rain Camellia"

This is a regular *nihon-to* (Japanese sword), but a famous one, made by the master swordsmith Sukehiro.

WORDS ARE CHEAP.

▲小天狗 KOTENGU: "Little Devil"

After his Shido and the sword Tatsumasa, this is the weapon Manji uses most. Actually, I realized while doing this book that it's adapted to Tatsumasa's "gimmick" (you can connect them together).

MANJI SEEMS TO LIKE CLIMBING TREES WITH THIS ONE.

▲男転 OKOROBI: "Man Toppler"

What the hell is this thing?
Don't ask me.

▲女蟲 MERABI: "Lady Gadfly"

By the time you get to this, it's hard to tell if it's a sword at all. Maybe it started out as a carpenter's tool, or surveyor's gear or something...? He's never given either of them a real workout in the story so far (...although he does use them a little bit in *Dreamsong*). I guess I'll use them again at least once before the series ends.

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

While the immortal samurai, Manji, has his hands full with a trio of skillful and merciless killers from the renegade Itto-ryū sword school, Manji's charge, Rin, prepares to make her way through government checkpoints to leave Edo and find Anotsu Kagehisa — lord of the Itto-ryū and murderer of her parents — and fulfill her quest of vengeance. Unjustly wanted for murder, Rin must try to pass in disguise, but the checkpoint officers are no fools, and she will not pass without a thorough interrogation — and one slip will mean Rin's execution!

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